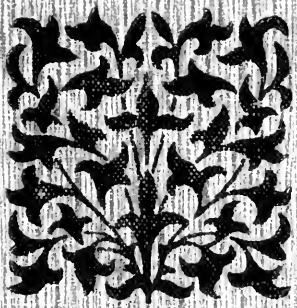
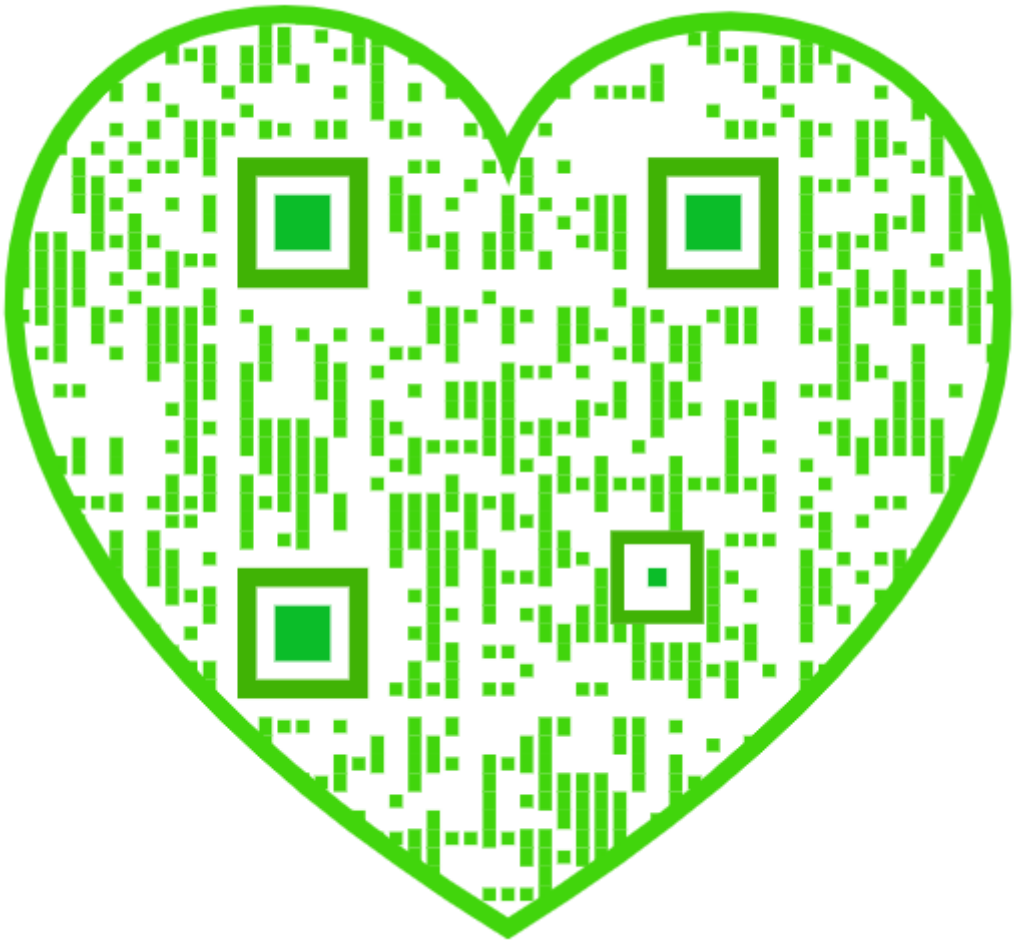
FISHING
for PLEASURE
and CATCHING IT

by

E. MARSTON
(The Amateur Angler)





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FISHING FOR PLEASURE

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WORKS BY E. MARSTON

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FALLS OF THE CONWAY, NORTH WALES.

Page 1.

FISHING FOR PLEASURE

AND

CATCHING IT

BY

E. MARSTON, F.R.G.S.
(THE AMATEUR ANGLER)

AND

TWO CHAPTERS ON ANGLING
IN NORTH WALES

BY

R. B. MARSTON

"Complete content—the day has brought it—
He fished for pleasure—and he caught it."
The Optimist, by H. J. W.

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DEDICATORY LETTER

To my Daughter ALICE *and my Granddaughter* LORNA

It was with you, my ALICE, *that I had many a pleasant ramble in the woods and over the rocks which encompass the winding* Dove, *in the happy days of old; since those days you have known what sorrow is, and deep affliction. May God in His mercy grant that your future time on earth may be full of happiness and joy.—To you I dedicated my first Booklet.*

And to you, too, my gentle LORNA, *I dedicated that* Dovedale Booklet—*long before you were old enough to read it. In it I said: "If it serves no other purpose, it may serve to remind you, when you grow older, that once upon a time, when you were not yet three years old, you romped with your grandfather on the green grass under the apple-trees; you fished with him in the River, his walking-stick for your rod, two yards of twine for your line, a pin for your hook, and a battered metal minnow for your fish—and how gleefully you landed your little tin 'tout'!"*

Since those never-to-be-forgotten happy days you, my Lorna, have grown up to womanhood,

> *"Standing with reluctant feet,*
> *Where the brook and river meet,*
> *Womanhood and childhood fleet."*
>
> LONGFELLOW.

May all your future days on earth be as unclouded and as happy as those with which you have hitherto been blessed.

My first *book was dedicated to your Aunt and to you only—for in those days you had only one baby brother, now you have a whole host of brothers and sisters and cousins, who will not be jealous because my* last *book bears the same dedication as my* first.—*God be with you all!*

E. M.

London, February 14th, 1906.

908753

NOTE

NOT long ago I published a volume containing some scraps from my old workshop under the title of "AFTER WORK." That book was most kindly and indulgently received; it referred mostly to my WORKING CAREER. A very large edition was rapidly sold, and it is now *out of print.*

During the last twenty years of my life, at least, it has become a habit of mine to spend my PLAY-TIME mostly by the side of some far-away pleasant stream where

"I fished for pleasure and I caught it."

The stories of my holiday rambles between 1884 and 1903 are told successively in eight consecutive small volumes, published at intervals; I also published the two following volumes which are not *holiday books*: "Sketches of Booksellers of Other Days," published in 1901, and "Sketches of some Booksellers of the time

of Dr. Johnson"; and "After Work" (mentioned above), published in 1904.

These books, possessing no claim to literary distinction, have yet, if I may judge by the many encomiums which have been passed on them by the press, and by a host of friendly correspondents, given pleasure to a large number of people, and that is a reward for which I may well be grateful.

The present volume completes a round dozen of books which I have thus inflicted on my good friends—now surely the time has arrived for me to cry off—

> "Frail creatures are we all! To be the best,
> Is but the fewest faults to have:—
> Look then to thyself, and leave the rest
> To God, thy conscience, and the grave."
>
> COLERIDGE.

E. M.

N.B.—Throughout this volume will be found, frequently repeated, the words Piscator Major (R. B. M.) *and the* Professor (G.Y.). *The first has been long so called to distinguish him from the* Minor *Amateur Angler; he has no other claim to be called "The Major." The latter has borne the title I have given him with commendable patience. He is a member of the* Flyfishers' Club.

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FISHING FOR PLEASURE AND CATCHING IT

CHAPTER I

MAY FLY FISHING IN HEREFORDSHIRE IN 1903

"We plunge and strive from spot to spot,
But not a fish will rise;
In wonderment at our ill lot,
Turn up our wistful eyes."
BLAKEY, *Fourteenth Century Fishing.*

June, 1903.

I HAVE a great affection for the beautiful county of Hereford, for my earliest and happiest days were spent in it. It is a county of fine woodland scenery, of charming meadows and pine-clad hills, and it is intersected by many a fine river. In the leafy month of June it is perhaps at its best; then Nature has but newly put on her varied garments of green, the fields

are all gold and silver with buttercups and daisies, and the woods are vocal with the songs of many birds.

> "Thus all looks gay and full of cheer,
> To welcome the new-liveried year."

In such a county, and amid such pleasant scenes, when the sun is casting a glamour of brightness over all, a visitor fresh from the smoke and toil and dizzy noises of a great city may be pardoned if he gives way for a moment at least to a feeling of delight in a situation so beautiful, and to him so new.

My good old friend, the Professor, had preceded me, and when I arrived at the station, there he was. I had not seen him for two years, and I was delighted to find him as cheery and jovial as ever. He had made all sorts of preparations for my comfort, regardless of his own, as usual. He was in high spirits, charmed with everything—the country, the village, the church, the river, the bright sunshine—and he soon aroused in me the youthful enthusiasm with which he was himself inspired.

It was amid such scenes as these that we had decided to make the head-quarters for our small exploits against the trout on what I may call the lower waters of the Lugg under the lee of Dinmore Hill; we have also tapped that fine stream in the upper regions. Our quarters are situated in a most delightful part of the county, and the

Lugg, meandering through its meadows, has just now in its fullness a really noble aspect. The neighbourhood has an ancient reputation for the quality of its trout fishing, and in bygone days it was a great privilege to fish its waters. Of late years I understand it has been somewhat neglected, and chiefly because some time ago when "navvies" were at work in the neighbourhood they seem to have regarded the river as their special perquisite for poaching, and fine sport they made of it. For many miles round here their mode of taking fish was to explode dynamite in the stream, which brought for them a temporary supply of dead fish, but destroyed thousands for no one's good. This diabolical process continued for a long time, completely depleted the river, and inflicted a permanent injury from which it has not yet recovered, or is only now recovering.

I have wandered along its banks from one end of the club water to the other, and have been almost fascinated with the many spots which, to an angler's eye, would seem to teem with fish—there, one might say, is the very spot, the pool, the eddy, the stream where in imagination you have only to cast your fly and land your creelful of fish in no time; but in reality it is not so. The truth must be told: the river is there, the charm is there, the lovely beauties of Nature are there, but the fish are not there!

We, the Professor and I, fished it up and we fished it down, but rarely could we see or get a rise. I am quite prepared to admit that the time was not propitious. True it was the May Fly time, and in ordinary times the river abounds with May Fly. Yet, although we began to fish on June 4th, an uncertainty prevailed amongst the knowing ones as to whether the May Fly had been already "up" or whether it had yet to come up. An occasional *caddow* (as they are always called here) may be seen floating down stream, but he attracted no attention from below; the trout, if there are any, were quite indifferent. We captured a few small ones, and two or three above the 10-inch standard, but the big ones—and there are big ones, so we were confidently told—fed below, and close under the banks. The river was full, slightly discoloured, and in places quite milky from the recent thunderstorms up in the hills. Again, on June 5th, we fished this lovely stream, with a hot burning sun in our faces and a biting cold north-east wind at our backs—and again without any success worth mentioning; our failures were fully confirmed by other anglers.

Another difficulty about this part of the Lugg is that it runs ten or fifteen feet deep between steep banks ten to twenty feet high, and mostly overhung with alders and other bushes. Here and there one finds an opening where fine casts

can be made, but to the fly fisher it is, to say the least, a tantalizing and difficult river to fish; for bobbing or bottom fishing it is more accessible. No wading is permitted, and if it was, the river is far too deep and strong to wade. Another of the troubles which the past neglect of the riparian owners has brought about is that it abounds with chub and pike and other coarse fish, and also with otters, and until these enemies of the trout and grayling are thinned out it would be useless to attempt to restock it. I am informed that a praiseworthy effort is now being made in earnest to restore the river to its pristine high-class character, both by clearing out the coarse fish and restocking with trout and grayling, so that in the near future subscribers may look for a better return than they have lately been enabled to obtain. The effort certainly deserves warm encouragement.

On Saturday, June 6th, we availed ourselves of a cordial invitation from a correspondent to fish this river in the neighbourhood of Kingsland, and he also obtained for us an order to fish in another quarter on Monday, June 8th, of which we gladly made use. Of our doings on these two occasions I will speak later on.

After those excursions we returned to head-quarters on Monday night, and on Tuesday morning we were welcomed with a downpour of rain, which kept us close prisoners all day.

Wednesday morning presented us with a dismal fog, or blight, as they call it here, and the afternoon with a steady downpour.

It may be observed that I began this chapter in sunshine and glory—I have to finish it in doleful despondency. To sit quietly for two days in private lodgings, however cosy they may be, is not an enlivening experience. We have books and papers in galore, but we cannot be always reading. We found watching the straight downpour of the continuous rain helped to pass the dreary time, but our cramped energies demand some more exciting outlet. In yonder meadow is a cow bellowing and bemoaning the weaning of her calf; a donkey strutting about among some big cart horses, rubbing necks with them, and thinking himself equal to the best of them.

> "Two harmless lambs are butting one the other—
> Which done, both bleating run, each to his mother."

We play at draughts till the game palls upon us; we gossip with the landlady and listen to her stories. One of us is now, in this month of June, croodling over the fire with a bad cold and sore throat; the other, finding nothing more congenial to do, has for some time set himself to conclude this chapter, which began so happily, by abusing the fishing, and so relieve his mind of the monotony which is wholly attributable to the weather; if the general tone of what I

have written has anything of bitterness in it, the cause is sufficiently clear, for how can one write cheerfully when one feels that one's precious time is fleeing, and that we are helpless prisoners? Even the placid and genial and sore-throated Professor is beginning to growl and grumble. Our May Fly fishing, I fear, is over, for by to-morrow the river will be in flood, and on Saturday I return to the mill.

I have already mentioned the fact that we had taken two days off this water and gone higher up. It was on Saturday, June 6th, that we accepted the invitation of the friend already mentioned, who had sent us a club member's ticket to fish the Kingsland water.

Accordingly, we arose betimes, walked a mile and a half to the station, took train, and reached our destination by ten o'clock. We fished from that time till seven o'clock, and returned to head-quarters by ten o'clock p.m., well tired. That, in brief, is the story of our day out. To expand a little, I may say that we were met at the station by the courteous Mr. W. I was glad to make his personal acquaintance. In his pretty cottage he keeps all the requisites of a fisherman. He has always on hand a large stock of all the flies suitable for Herefordshire streams, many of which are made by himself; and not to be beaten in the matter of wings and

hackles he keeps a large variety of pure bred game fowls. These fowls, though not certified pedigree birds, have as fine a private record as any birds could wish for. Mr. W. and his ancestors, these birds and their ancestors, have dwelt together in peace and harmony (except when two cocks meet, then it is war to the death) for more than sixty years.

The birds seem to be quite aware that their chief duty in life is to provide neck feathers and hackles of true and varied plumage for all kinds of imitations of the winged insects which so artfully betray salmon, trout, and grayling. They know it, and sometimes they feel it. The cocks are in separate dens, each with his own seraglio. There are many cocks there of the most sprightly and elegant plumage, and there are others whose necks are bare, not to say raw, as though suffering from some disease incident to moulting. It curiously happens that the disease breaks out just about the time when there comes a large demand from all parts of the country for feathers of a special plumage. Mr. W. says he cannot account for it, and he thinks a carbolic treatment would be good for them; anyhow, the poor beggars have a proud but rather unhappy look about them. Now I was assured that the birds from which the stock of feathers is really plucked have elegant and graceful necks and shoulders, and they supply abundance of fea-

thers seemingly without missing them; they deliver up their treasures under an operation certainly less painful than toothache or tooth-drawing. Among the flies he supplied us with is a special Spent Gnat ("Ragged Robin" I have called it), which is a most attractive lure on this water.

Mr. W. not only met us at the station, he accompanied us to the water and set us going. It was a lovely day, but the wind as usual kept in the same unhappy north-east. Consequently, for I firmly believe that wind in that quarter is distinctly inimical to fishing, there was no rise, and nothing to rise at—May Fly only seen here and there now and then. A further consequence was that, although the river here is well stocked and well looked after, we only hooked and lost or captured two or three brace between us. Other anglers were there even less successful than we. I do not remember that any adventure befell us on this occasion, except that in driving four miles across country to the station the wind was more biting than in the bitterest month of the year. We were chilled to the bones, and the Professor is still suffering from the effects of that baleful drive.

On Monday, June 8th, by special invitation, we started for a day's outing in another direction. Ten miles by rail and a drive of four miles through picturesque villages and enchanting

scenery brought us to the scene of our day's work. In the train we had met with an enthusiastic young farmer, who, seeing how we were equipped, at once asked us whither we were bent. "Ah," said he, "I wish I were going with you, I know that water well; a friend of mine got twelve brace of pounders up their last week, but you won't do much there to-day; the caddow must be off by this time, and this north-east wind and bright sun won't help you. It is a mistake," he added, "to think that all the big trout lie always under the banks. You will find them mostly in the middle of the river where it runs deep and slow. I have waited in such places half an hour at a time for a rise—there the trout ranges up and down for twenty or thirty yards; when I have learnt his boundary I cast my fly three or four yards above it and let it float gently down, and I have him. Not only must your fly float, but your line also, for if that sinks in the water, and it is no easy matter to prevent it, your chance is gone." Thus did this garrulous youth instruct us old hands in the art of dry fly fishing.

Otter and Moorhen.

"Can you tell me," said he, "if it is a common thing for otters to take moorhens? I have lived on this water all my life and fished it, too, but till last week I was not aware of it. I was waiting

for a rise down the river when a moorhen sprang out of the water on to a fallen tree, and an otter followed her closely—he had caught her by the tail and she had fluttered up on to the tree; he ran along the tree and up one of the branches, but the bird got away, leaving some of her tail feathers in his mouth. Seeing me, he made a sudden dive from the branch into the water with a great splash and disappeared. For me it was a new fact in natural history, for I had always thought otters confined their diet to fish in the water."

The fact was new to me also, but, nevertheless, it may be perfectly true that otters are not so limited in their taste—if moorhens, then ducklings and goslings may sometimes serve to whet their appetites. "Those villainous vermin," says Izaak Walton. "I hate them perfectly because they love fish so well, or, rather, because they destroy so much."

Here it was, near this tree, that I saw this same tailless moorhen with half a dozen little black chicks floating about; on seeing me she flew across the river and began clucking for the young ones to follow, but for them it was no easy task; the river they had to cross was rushing down in a mighty stream, and I was curious to see how these little week-old birds would manage it. It was really wonderful to see how the little mites, one after the other, stemmed the torrent.

The first one sailed up as far as he could to get alongside the current, and then boldly floated into it, and so was carried away down and seemingly lost for ever, but the black spot floated slantingly atop of the water. Away down below he reached the opposite smooth water, and soon joined his anxious mamma, and so one by one the others all followed and disappeared under the opposite bank. This, it should be said, occurred in the Kingsland Water on Saturday.

Our Monday's drive took us some miles up the river; we began to fish up stream, and a lovely stream it is up there, not so large as down below, but it winds about amid the most charming surroundings—through a narrow upland valley bordered on both sides by lofty conical hills pine clad to the top—as much like Swiss scenery as any to be found out of Switzerland—an out of the world kind of district with not a house to be seen for miles. Up this narrow and winding valley—a kind of gap in the mountains, which at its entrance is wide open to the north and east—the north-east wind, which was blowing hard outside, rushed with concentrated force, and I am sorry to say it played the very deuce with our fishing. The river is full of trout. They were rising, too, but we could not get our flies on the water, for the blast was from most points dead against us. We

hooked and lost many a fine trout, and we bagged some, but not what we should have done but for these sudden small gales and squalls. We had, however, a very pleasant time of it, and it was a day to dwell in our memories.

About five o'clock we reached a keeper's cottage, hidden away in the woods, apparently miles away from any other habitation. It is a dwelling which has done its duty for many and many a generation of keepers, and is now in a dilapidated and crumbling condition, and is distinctly not a creditable residence for respectable people, but here we found a welcome place of rest after our many hours of toil. The keeper's wife, a very pleasant and kindly hostess, made a fire, boiled her kettle, and soon gave us a most welcome cup of tea and home-made bread and butter—for which we were not a little grateful. Her son, Ernest, a bright boy of twelve, knows every fish in the river, and took us up to the spots were the big fish lie. In one of these pools I hooked and landed a one-pound trout, and we were just beginning to have some grand sport when, alas! we were warned by the arrival of our trap that time was up. We had four miles to drive to catch our train, and so we must pack up and be off. Then the wind sank, the Grey Drake began to flutter up in shoals, and the trout began to taste them, one would think, for the first time. It was aggravating to see them

flopping up and up and up all along the stream as we trotted off to the station.

The owner of the water who had given us this day's delight, but who must be nameless, arrived in his carriage with a friend just as we were quitting the magic scene. He knew the ropes better than we: he began to fish when we left off, and he surely had a grand time before him. He gave us a most cordial invitation to come again at any time on giving him a short notice, and so we bade farewell to one of the most lovely scenes I have ever had the pleasure of fishing in.

And now, writing on June 11th, I may say for certain that the May Fly fishing of 1903 is concluded. The river is in full flood, fields are under water, and I, poor bird of passage, must seek "fresh woods and pastures new." The weather just now is quite disheartening—I am sitting by a fire on this cold winter's day which has dropped into the middle of June, occupied as I have described above, and the Professor, who came here for a month, vows he can stand it no longer; he will be off to-morrow and so must I, for the river, under the most favourable weather, will not be fishable for a week or ten days. I hear of some grand catches now and then. One cheery angler at a station put his head in and said to an acquaintance in the carriage, "I got four brace, some over two

pounds, last night." "Yes," said our neighbour to us as the train moved off, "and by the time he reaches the next station the four brace will have grown to six, and, like Falstaff's 'men in buckram,' they will be a dozen brace before he reaches the end of his journey." As a matter of fact, on our return home in the train we actually saw with our own eyes, and with some envy in our hearts, nineteen fine pound trout, shown to us by two young fellows who had that day caught them with the *caddow* in a neighbouring stream.

I quitted our head-quarters on the 12th, and left the disconsolate Professor packing up. May we meet again soon, and in better weather!

Since writing the foregoing I regret to learn that the Mr. W. referred to on page 7 died some time ago. His business as a Fishing Tackle seller, a producer of Game-birds' feathers, and as a maker of artificial flies, all excellent in their way, is still carried on by his widow, and there is no reason why her name and address should not be given in full.

Mrs. Williams,
Lugg Cottage,
Kingsland,
Herefordshire.

CHAPTER II

"HAMPSHIRE DAYS" [1]

July, 1903.

ON a glorious evening in the last week of June we—my young grandson and I—were playing at toss-ball under the trees on the common. "Heigho!" shouted Eric; "there 's a stag-beetle!" Off he went and I followed. He was buzzing about, apparently aimlessly, sometimes over the young lime trees and sometimes just over our heads. Eric threw his cap at him, and so did I. Presently he floundered into a lower branch among the leaves, and I easily hooked him down into the long grass, where he seemed to be quite helpless. His stag-like antlers and his hairy legs so entangled him in the long grass that he was quite grateful when I gave him the help of the point of my stick, to which he clung

[1] By W. H. Hudson. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 8vo, pp. xvi, 344.

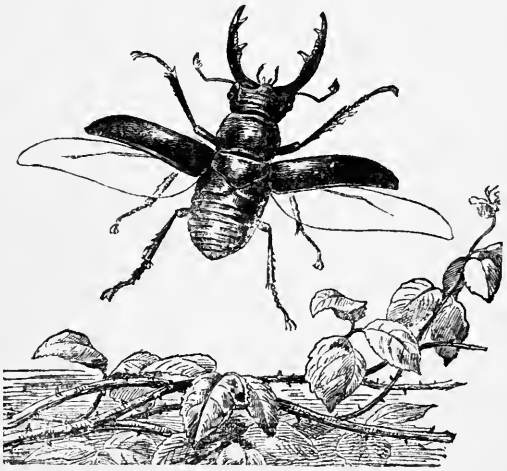
tenaciously. Eric, full of excitement, soon bundled him up in his handkerchief and carried him home triumphantly. I wanted to let him off on the score of cruelty, but Eric wouldn't listen to the suggestion for an instant. "I'll put him into the box with my garden snails, give him some fresh leaves, and you'll see he'll be quite happy." So he was shut up in the box with some fresh leaves and half a score of big shell-snails.

These snails, instead of being thrown over into the next garden, as is the usual practice, I fancy, had been placed by Eric in this "durance vile" for some days, as a punishment for their sins in devouring the young green shoots of his Michaelmas daisies. They fed greedily upon the leaves, slimed about the sides of the box, deposited a large number of round white eggs the size of small pills, and Eric said they were as happy as could be. It was quite clear to us that snails don't eat stag-beetles, but not quite so clear that our stag-beetle wouldn't eat them; none of us knew exactly what was the favourite food of stag-beetles, or what sort of companion this one would prove to the snails: whether he would quarrel and fight, or whether he would be friendly and sociable. Next morning we went into the garden to see how they were getting on. We found the snails all huddled up in one corner, closely shut up in their houses, and the stag at

the other end of the box looking very fierce and defiant—and hungry. The snails had eaten nothing, and apparently were afraid of the stag; they were acting on the defensive, fully armed in their thick shells against attack, and evidently the beetle had gone supperless to bed. Eric insisted on giving them another day and night to cultivate friendly relations if so disposed. Next morning on opening the box the situation was exactly the same. The snails remained still in their impregnable fortress, and the stag clinging to the same spot, looking fiercer and hungrier than ever. Even if the flesh of snails had been his favourite dish, as probably it is, he must have starved here in the closest proximity to it, for even his strong jaws would be powerless to storm those massive walls. Beetles generally are said to have enormous appetites, and will devour anything that comes in their way.

"Why," cried Eric, "if they go on in this way much longer they will all be famished together. I must raise the siege." So he took the stag-beetle on the end of a stick, gave him a swing, and off he flew, weakly and floundering, as if on the verge of starvation, alighting in some bushes in the next garden. He was seen afterwards buzzing about over the trees, and we wondered whether he had sufficient sense or instinct to find his way back to his wife and family on the common.

It was by a curious coincidence that I had just brought home the book, the title of which heads this article, and the very first page I opened up was the one containing this excellent picture of the stag-beetle, which has been kindly lent



THE STAG-BEETLE

by the publishers. Naturally Eric and I were curious to know what Mr. Hudson had to tell us about him. He tells us what in fact we had just found out for ourselves, namely, that

"during the last week in June we can look for the appearance of our most majestical insect; he is an evening flier, and a little before sunset

begins to show himself abroad. He is indeed a monarch among hexapods, with none equal to him, save, perhaps, the great goblin moth, and in shape and size and solidity he bears about the same relation to pretty bright flies as a horned rhinoceros does to volatile squirrels and monkeys."

Then he goes on to give us an amusing account of his buzzing flight and clumsy entanglements, when, like Coelebs, he is "in search of a wife"; but he does not tell us what he usually feeds upon. Not being a naturalist I will not venture to express any opinion on this subject of food. There seems to be very little known as to the habits of these familiar insects. It has been said that they pass their larval and pupal stages within the trunk of a decaying tree. Probably in the perfect state their food may be some kind of fungus, or dried leaves or decaying wood.

I have been asked to write something about this book—not to review it critically; that is not my department. I come to it, not as wielding the authority of a master, but as a learner—a pupil, interested always in all things pertaining to nature, but with the fewest possible opportunities of personally worshipping at her shrine. That is why it gives me infinite pleasure to sit in an easy chair and revel in just such a book as this. The title of it, "Hampshire Days," is really too brief: it almost conceals rather than reveals

what it is all about. One must at least read preface and contents of chapters to find out. It is clear, however, from these that the author has spent not only days but weeks and months and years in wandering about the woods and forests of Hampshire, and the book is the outcome of wide experience and knowledge.

I find it the pleasantest occupation possible to sit in an armchair and luxuriate in the pleasant pictures, scenes, animals, birds, and insects which, as in a charming panorama, pass under my eyes in these pages—*this* is pleasure, but to perform the allotted task of writing about them, *that* is labour! for while every page has a charm of its own it is not easy to discriminate. It is needless to say that the book is an exceedingly readable one. The author not only describes well what he sees and does, from the naturalist's point of view, but the book has a pleasant literary tone not always found in the works of naturalists.

There are fourteen chapters, and if I extract a bit here and there it must not be inferred that they are the best, but only as samples of good and curious things with which it abounds. Here is something about my old friend the hornet:

"I was sitting in the shade of a large elm tree one day, when I was visited by a big hornet, who swept noisily down and settled on the trunk four or five feet above the ground. A quantity

of sap had oozed out into a deep cleft of the rough bark, had congealed there, and the hornet had discovered it. Before he had been long feeding on it I saw a little bank-vole come out from the roots of the tree and run up the trunk, looking very bright and pretty in his bright chesnut fur as he came into the sunlight, stealing up to the lower end of the cleft full of thickened sap. He, too, began feeding on it. The hornet, who was at the upper end of the cleft, quite four inches apart from the vole, at once stopped eating, and regarded the intruder for some time, then advanced towards him in a threatening attitude. The vole was frightened at this, starting and erecting his hair, and once or twice he tried to recover his courage and resume his feeding, but the hornet still keeping up his hostile movements, he eventually slid quietly down and hid himself at the roots. When the hornet departed he came out again and went to the sap. . . . Rarely have I looked on a prettier little comedy in wild life."

Our author confirms the old story of the young cuckoo hatched in a robin's nest ejecting the eggs, and he actually saw and describes the method adopted by this two or three days old "jelly-like creature" to get the young robin on to the hollow of his own naked back, and so to gradually work it up to the edge of the nest, and, "standing actually on the rim, jerked his body, causing the robin to fall off clean away from the nest. It fell in fact on a dock-leaf five inches below the rim of the nest and rested

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"THE YOUNG CUCKOO, STANDING ON THE RIM, JERKED HIS BODY, CAUSING THE ROBIN TO FALL."

there." The author expresses his amazement at the callous indifference shown by the parent robins to the fate of their own offspring, whilst they continued to pamper the cuckoo.

Here is something about a swallow and a pike:

"All at once fifty yards out from the margin there was a great splash, as if a big stone had been flung out into the lake, and then from the falling spray and rocking water rose a swallow, struggling laboriously up, its plumage drenched, and flew slowly away. A big pike had dashed at and tried to seize it, and the swallow had escaped as by a miracle."

The same chapter provides the following picturesque tragedy of the grasshopper and the spider:

"I saw a common green grasshopper leap away and by chance land in a geometric web in a small furze bush. Caught in the web, it began kicking with its long legs, and would in three seconds have made its escape. But mark what happened. Directly over the web and above the kicking grasshopper there was a small web-made thimble-shaped shelter, mouth down, fastened to a spray, and the spider was sitting in it. Looking down, it must have seen and known that the grasshopper was far too big and strong to be held in that frailest snare, that it would be gone in a moment, and the net torn to pieces. It also must have seen that it was no wasp nor dangerous insect of any kind, and so, instantly,

straight and swift as a leaden plummet, it dropped out of the silvery bell it lived in and attacked it at the head. The falces were probably thrust into the body between the head and the prothorax, for almost instantly the struggle ceased, and in less than three seconds the victim appeared perfectly dead."

In Chapter XIII reference is made to the abundance of swifts, and herein our author makes a statement with which I am unable to agree. He tells us that the May Fly has been decreasing, and in places disappearing altogether from some of the Hampshire streams. That is true I know, for I have fished the Itchen many consecutive seasons, especially in the May Fly time; but our author ridicules the idea that the swallow is in any measure responsible for their decrease. He attributes it wholly to the swift, because he happened on one evening in June, 1902, to have seen swifts snapping up every insect that appeared on the water. Therefore, he concluded that "the swift and not the swallow is the chief culprit." I regard them as *Arcades ambo*—one as bad as the other. Sometimes I have seen the river covered with swallows and martins all in pursuit of and clearing off every May Fly that appeared; at other times I have seen swifts alone (as did our author) occupying themselves with this destruction; and again at other times I have seen all three species engaged

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THE BIG HORNET AND THE LITTLE BANK VOLE.

in the same pursuit. I have no hesitation in saying that one is as guilty as the other. Starlings, blackbirds, sparrows, thrushes, and even dragon flies have all a full share of responsibility for the destruction of the hapless May Fly.

CHAPTER III

ON THE ITHON

"That mysterious delight of pursuing an invisible object, which gives to hunting and fishing their unutterable and almost spiritual charm; which made Shakespeare a mighty poacher; Davy and Chantrey the patriarchs of fly-fishing, by which the twelve foot rod is transfigured into an enchanter's wand potent over the unseen wonders of the water-world to 'call up spirits from the vasty deep' which will really come 'if you care for them,' at least if the conjuration be orthodox and they there."—CHARLES KINGSLEY, *Yeast*.

August, 1903.

SEVEN years ago I fished the Ithon round about Llandrindod Wells, and I told the story of it in "An Old Man's Holidays, 1898." That was to me a very interesting trip, although the fishing part of it was not of an exciting nature, and did not result in any success to speak of. It was a chubby river then, and chub thrive in it now. The part of it which I fished then was

up the stream towards and beyond "Shaky Bridge," where the scenery is very lovely and compensates in some degree for a lack of fish. My present excursion took me downwards as far as Newbridge Church, where I had not been before.

It was not the attraction of fishing that drew me for a few days to Llandrindod Wells on this occasion; nor was it to drink its invigorating waters that I went there; but being there I took up my quarters at the Rock House Hotel. I went to that well-known hostelry because I had observed that amongst other good things it possessed seven miles of excellent fishing. I, however, seemed to be almost the only guest among the crowd of over a hundred who possessed a fishing rod, or who knew a trout from a chub, or a salmon from a pike.

The hotel I found to be good and most pleasantly situated, surrounded by its own romantic grounds, which include a bosky dell or ravine, full of every variety of trees and shrubs of every tint of foliage, alive with the songs or twitterings of many birds, and many a winding path, cosy nook and corner, and rustic seat, on which old folks may rest and ponder on this and that "as they take tobacco," and young folks chatter and laugh, and make love and talk nonsense. These grounds overlook a fine sweep of the Ithon and the hotel meadows which form

its right bank for a considerable distance—as far up, in fact, as the fine suspension bridge.

The Ithon is the most tantalizing stream I ever saw—lovely in most parts, and in some spots exquisitely beautiful and picturesque in its surroundings; it is, from a fly fisher's standpoint, the most unfishable river imaginable.

Now I thought I would try my landlord's lower water, for he holds many a mile which I had not yet seen; he assured me that the river was full of fish, but he did not tell me of the difficulties in the way—not being a fisherman, he knew nothing of them.

On his advice, I took a trap about four miles down to Newbridge old church; from thence upwards, I was told that all but the first meadow adjoining the road was perfectly free to me, on this side of the river only. I am quite sure that our landlord had seen this part of the river from the opposite meadows only; in fact, I may almost say I defy him to traverse this side, close to the water, for any distance—it really cannot be done. I should like to describe, as plainly and as literally as I can, what happened to me on that eventful day.

It was on Wednesday, August 5th, a morning so threatening of rain that I thought my rain-proof "slip on" indispensable; it proved only an encumbrance, for the day was hot and fine. I was driven down to the old church. I was told

that I must not fish in the first meadow; beyond that I was monarch of all I could get through.

This first tiny little meadow balked me. There was no way into it—a very thick tall hedge the whole length of it on the roadside, and a gate at the end farthest from the river. That gate was chained and padlocked, and, of course, barb-wired along the top. There was no possibility of getting over or through or under it. The strong lad who drove me suggested that we might lift it off its hinges, and this after much vigorous exertion we succeeded in doing. I left the lad to fix up the gate, and was free to begin operations.

I started, rod and net in one hand, and waterproof over my shoulder. I soon crossed the meadow and reached a wood. In this wood my lawful rights began, but they were of no avail. The wood formed an angle with the water of never less than seventy-five degrees, and came sheer down to the deep river. The rugged path through the wood, if path it could be called, ran mostly a hundred yards above, and consisted chiefly of briars, thorns, nettles, bracken, and bushes; through these, on slippery shale, I struggled for a quarter of a mile, and was then landed in a peaceful, pretty, solitary little meadow—formed by the receding of the wooded hill from the river side. Here I was at last down at the river which I found running very deep

and slow, and strongly lined with barbed wire and bushes, quite impenetrable. At the end of this meadow I was met by a strong stream running into the river. Walking along the side for some distance I found a crossing of stepping stones; this brought me into another sweet little meadow, in which, to my surprise and delight, I actually found one or two open spaces where I could cast freely. Here I caught a good fat chub, quite a pound, and then a small trout: the latter I put back alive, and the former I killed and left conspicuously on the bank for "hawks to peck at."

Here I was waited upon by a keeper who sprang up from somewhere about. He demanded, and I showed him, my credentials. I thanked him for performing his duty so efficiently, and in return he told me that the river was periodically netted for coarse fish, such as chub and pike, but that unless the netters were closely watched they would frequently reverse their orders by keeping the trout and returning the chub. He volunteered the information that now I had got through the worst of my troubles, and that thenceforth there was not a yard of the river that was not fishable and full of fish, a statement which, for aught I know to the contrary, may be quite true as regards the latter part of it, but that it is fly-fishable I distinctly deny. He also informed me that he knew

nothing about fishing, and disliked it. He had enough to do to look after his hens and young pheasants here and there about the woods, so his opinion about the fishing was not of much account.

Let it be distinctly understood that I am writing as a fly fisherman only; for bottom fishing no doubt it is fishable in many places, and the fisherman would everywhere be richly rewarded, for chub and roach and dace abound. The river could also be fished here and there by wading, but for the most part it runs ten feet deep, where waders would not be available. These parts may be fished in a collapsible Berthon boat, or a coracle such as may be seen on the Severn at Shrewsbury and elsewhere.

At the end of this meadow the great oak wood again protruded itself down to the very edge of the water, loftier and thicker and steeper than the portion I had already laboriously struggled through. Here it lifted its oak-crowned head almost perpendicularly, two hundred yards up. I penetrated as far as I could go in the hope of finding an opening, but it grew worse and worse. This wooded hill bordered the river for miles, as it seemed to me, uninterruptedly. I was now in the depth of it, impossible to proceed farther, too far to go back, and if I had gone back I could not have got out of that little gate-locked, barb-wired, high-hedged

meadow which shut me out from the road—the lad had long since gone home with the trap, so there was no outlet that way.

There was nothing left for me but to face the hill and so find the path at the top which sane people take. Ah! that hill. I reached the top at last, a climb not discreditable to a youth of nineteen, but for an old boy more than four times that age it was an effort to be proud of. The hill was so steep that one could only wonder how the enormous oaks and elms which clung to its side could drive their roots into it in such a way as to maintain their hold. It was so steep that for most of the way I had to throw my net and rod up ahead of me and then scramble up on my hands and knees, grasping at anything I could get hold of, and when I got to the top I cried "Excelsior!" But on looking down over the ground I had clambered up I felt terrified. Coming up step by step it did not seem so dangerous or so difficult, but to look down it seemed almost to impel me to take a jump, which, barring being dashed against one tree or another, must have landed me souse into the deep river, an almost perpendicular plunge, just as if one were to spring from the top of the cross of St. Paul's and land somewhere in Cheapside or Ludgate Hill.

After such a climb as that I felt that with a little practice I might walk up and down the

Nelson column in Trafalgar Square, as I have seen the steeplejacks doing.

Now, instead of being at the pleasant river-side, as those innocent people at the hotel, including the landlord, supposed me to be all the time, here was I hundreds of feet above it, and happily on a better path which must lead me somewhere. On the top of this ridge I pursued my way under the grateful shade of the wood which shut me out so completely from the river; and up here it was that, hungry and athirst, foot-sore and weary, I sat me down in the shade to partake of the precious packet of sandwiches which I had asked my landlady to cut for me; she had deputed the work to a waiter. I cannot, I will not, bless that waiter, nor will I do the other thing for him; but I cannot, I will not, ever forget or soon forgive him. I was all but starving, and yet those sandwiches were so coarse, so vile, so utterly uneatable, that I was constrained to scatter them to the birds of the air and the beasts of the woods, if peradventure some may be found that could devour them.

I pursued my way along the ridge for a mile or two through meadows on the hills yet unmown. At length I came to a point where I was able to dive down to a meadow adjoining the river.

Now, our genial landlord, though he possesses so many miles of the river, has, it appears, no

control over the fences or stiles, and everywhere in my experience do the farmers make these stiles and fences as awkward and impassable as they can.

I got down to the corner of the meadow homeward bound. I found it absolutely blocked with barbed wire. I had to follow the hedge for a quarter of a mile or so, through the farmer's mowing grass, to find a gate, and that gate led me into a meadow which had an equally impenetrable hedgerow between me and the meadow adjoining the river.

Thus I spent the greater part of the day in the way I have tried to describe. I saw very little of the river, except a glimpse here and there away down yonder through the trees. I got back to the hotel wearied and footsore. I had to face the multitude placidly taking their afternoon tea outside on the verandas, and I passed by them as boldly as a tamed lion. "What sport have you had?" cried they. "Oh, chub! chub!" said I, "nothing but chub! I've lined the river banks with them—go and see for yourselves."

Notwithstanding these little troubles, I must say that it was a glorious day and I revelled in the grand scenery; I found

"A pleasure in the pathless woods,"

for it was one of those days when the distant

hills stand in the sharpest outline, and every way one looks the eye at least is gratified and pleased, even whilst the feet are sore, the bones ache, and the inner man in a state of collapse.

Undoubtedly the river is full of fish, as my landlord assured me. The river swarms with chub, and where these are so plentiful very few trout are to be found; there are also plenty of pike.

The meadows adjoining the Rock House Hotel, both below and above, are very charming, not only for anglers, but for mere ordinary idlers to ramble in. My time only permitted me to go down to them for an hour or two one afternoon. I should have done well with the chub, which abound there as elsewhere, and peradventure with a brace of trout which I saw rising under the opposite bank, only that unluckily I trod upon my top rod and smashed it after landing a big chub and hooking a monster that, after a splash on the top, sank sulkily down into the deep water, from which my rod, bent double, could not lift him; the hook came away after an interesting time, and my beautiful rod resumed its perfect straightness and elasticity only immediately afterwards to be smashed by my clumsy foot, and just at a time when I was preparing for that brace of trout. That top rod has accompanied me for many a year and on many expeditions, and has landed or lost many a trout and

grayling. Why was not the Professor with me? He would have spliced it in a trice, but I had no material with me. So it was that my fishing on the Ithon came ignominiously to an end.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE STOUR

"But here again, at fault we are,
Success attends our skill,
And fish in scores come wide and far
Our fishing creel to fill."
BLAKEY, *Fourteenth Century Fishing.*

August 12th.

HAVING accomplished the private business which had drawn me to Llandrindod, I betook me on Monday, August 10th, to Boscombe Bay, where I found a family gathering of nearly a score to welcome me. The next day was *dies non* for any outdoor work or play. It rained incessantly the whole day—that is all I need say about it. The two following days (Wednesday and Thursday) were lovely, and in comparison with the days which preceded and succeeded them, should be marked with big red letters; they were such indeed as we townsters very rarely realize. The first was spent blissfully on

the banks of the Stour, and the second by a little sea trip to Swanage.

Piscator Major had chosen Boscombe for his family annual outing not specially on account of the charms of that pleasant place, but mainly on account of some good fishing which had been made available to him in the neighbourhood.

On Wednesday, August 12th, a large party of us, fully equipped (the "A.A." excepted), started by rail for fishing in the Stour, not far away from Christchurch. The "A.A." preferred being present as a spectator only. Bob (aged eleven) was an old hand, but Eric (aged eight) was a novice —armed with a splendid new rod, a birthday present from P. Major, his uncle; Ted, a young athlete of nineteen, wields a fly-rod with skill, and, like the "A.A.," has a great abhorrence of sitting all day on a hard board in a punt. Ted, Bob, and Eric fished from the bank, the Major and Uncle Arthur took to the punt and stuck to it most of the day. The "A.A." acted as overseer, sometimes punting, sometimes marching on the bank. Then fishing operations began some distance up the river in a glorious green meadow, where were many cows and a ranting, roaring bull.

Bob, I think, had the honour of being first to land a pound perch, then another, and another. Ted was equally successful. These two caught ever so many, till at last they became

careless; but Eric—it was a sight to see him when he got hold of his first perch and landed him. And then he had hold of something big, which made his rod bend, and he clung manfully to it. I at the time was sitting in the boat some distance off, and saw the fish dangling in the air near the bank, where it was very difficult to land him. Ted soon came to his assistance, but the net could not be found (no wonder—I had it with me in the punt). He knelt down, tried to seize the fish in his hand, and, alas! in the struggle the perch broke away, and Eric's heart sank down into his shoes. It was a splendid fish. Ted says it must have been at least a pound and a half. Eric said it made him feel funny all down his back.

For a while the punt fishers did little or nothing, catching only small perch or roach and an occasional chub. We dropped down the stream till we came close to a bridge in amongst the tall reeds. There Uncle Arthur, at his first dip, hooked something big that made a rush, and eventually he brought in a 2 lb. chub—but 2 lb. chub soon came, like silver in Solomon's days, "to be thought nothing of." Arthur sat in that end of the punt and hauled in at least a dozen fish from 1 lb. to over 3 lb. in less than half an hour; whilst Piscator Major, sitting at the other end of the boat, could catch nothing. Then came the event of the day. Arthur's arms aching

with the many struggles he had had, gave in for a few minutes, then the Major moved over to Arthur's corner, and at his first cast got hold of something which caused a commotion in the water. People on the bridge looked down and passing boating parties stopped to see the fight. Tell me not after this that chub cannot make a struggle for life and liberty! This monster fought like a demon—away out into the stream, then a dash at the bank of tall reeds, which required all the Major's skill to keep him out of, then he tried to get under the boat, and the Major's little champion fly-rod, bent double, failed to prevent him getting under, and to get him back with fine gut and only a small No. 10 hook in him certainly required the sure hand of a master. At length he got him back from under the flat bottom to the edge, and as he was making a further dash for liberty into a bed of weeds the hook came away. "He 's off!" mournfully sang the Major, but the boatman managed by a very clever turn of the hand at what might be called the psychical moment, to get his big net under him—and in he came. I have seen thousands of chub at different times of the ordinary size, but never before had I seen such a perfect beauty as this one. He was put alive into the well. We gave up fishing for the day. On landing we took him at once to the railway station. In the station scales he weighed over 6 lb. The

Major packed him off to Messrs. Cooper to be set up.

Thus ended one of the most interesting of angling days that I have ever experienced.

The Major, not trusting the railway scales, asked Messrs. Cooper to weigh the fish, and they reported 5 lb. 11½ oz. twenty-four hours after it was caught.

CHAPTER V

LOLLING AND LOAFING

"How doth the man of common sense improve each
shining hour.
By doing nothing all the day with all his well-known
power.
How he delights to dream and muse, how well he likes
to laze,
To loll and loaf, to wink and blink, through sultry summer
days!"

Thursday, August 13th.

ANOTHER delightful day, and we made the best of it. Fishing in a punt is a pleasant diversion, but it can hardly be called the acme of enjoyment, although the Major seems to regard it as, next to salmon or dry-fly fishing, the most pleasurable employment of well-earned leisure. As there is no dry-fly fishing to be had in this immediate neighbourhood, it is no easy matter to get him away from his punt. The weather being as charming and enticing as weather could

be, the remainder of our small colony betook themselves to the sea, to the small extent of a trip to Swanage, and there we rambled on the cliffs, visited Mr. Burt's Great Globe, and loafed about, acting on the principle so pleasantly indicated in the above lines, taken from "A Tale of the Thames," by Mr. Ashby-Sterry.

"A Tale of the Thames," I may inform my readers, tells of the various adventures which befell two young and lively bachelors who had determined to explore and discover the source of the Thames, and having found that source (by a singular incident), to follow its course afoot until it became navigable, and then to sail on its waters to the great Babylon. It is by no manner of means a dry guide-book; the author describes every point of interest with the heart of a poet, the eye of a painter, and the pen of a charming writer. A happy vein of quiet humour pervades every page of the book; several young ladies become by turn the heroines of the voyage. The work is written very much in the style of William Black's "Adventures of a Houseboat," and is just as bright and attractive. The volume I am possessed of is a new edition, and may be found on any bookstall at the popular price of *sixpence*.

What a glorious sea-view one gets from these cliffs on such an ideal summer evening—the bright blue sea, and away off the Needles and

the white cliffs of the Isle of Wight presented a singular and remarkable picture, the white cliffs standing out clearly, while all around was hidden in the hazy distance, just as I have sometimes seen the bright cross on the top of St. Paul's suspended alone, as it were, in bright sunshine, all below being hidden in mist. The Bay of Naples could hardly be bluer and brighter than the sea out yonder, the black smoke from the funnel of a passing steamer being the only "one small speck of dark on that bright heaven of blue."

These two days I have already indicated as days to be printed in red letters. They were succeeded by five wretched days of wintry winds and pouring rain—and then comes another bright day "so cool, so calm, so bright," that my heart rejoiced and I felt quite young again. I was equal to a twenty-mile walk at least. A consultation was held: The Major and his two youngest boys voted for "The Stour," and off they went a-punting; five of the married folk were hot for a tremendous voyage round the Isle of Wight, and off they went; Ted and one of his young lady cousins were bent on cycling round the country—off they went; there remained three granddaughters and two grandsons to be accounted for, and they preferred my company. I am not much given to "lolling and loafing"; I confess myself to be in this respect

at least, akin to the gentle Elia; "I require woods," says he, "and they show me stunted coppices. I cry out for the waterbrooks, and pant for fresh streams and inland murmurs. I cannot stand all day on the naked beach, watching the capricious hues of the sea, shifting like the colour of a dying mullet."

So we started off to find the country. First we came upon a large common, gorgeous with the purple heather in full bloom; there we had fine games. We were three boys and three girls. We raced about the common and pelted each other with sticking burrs, very nice things for the girls' flowing back hair. We then wandered off and found ourselves on the high road to Christchurch. We raced on the road, plucked flowers, rested on gates and stiles, till by-and-by we unexpectedly came upon the banks of the beautiful Stour. There we took a lovely little skiff, just large enough to hold us, and we floated down the slowly-flowing deep stream, in and out among the tall reeds, under the trees overhanging the river for miles; the girls were "as happy as happy could be," and the boys noisy and frolicsome. By-and-by, away off down the river we espied a punt, and in that punt gravely sat the Major and his two baby boys, each with a fishing rod in his hand.

We came upon them quite unexpectedly, and they did not seem to want us—we were too

noisy, we interrupted their serious occupation. We tried to induce the two youngsters to desert and go home with us; they had been in that punt for many hours, and we thought they must be very tired of it. Young curly-headed four-year-old had caught several perch and roach, and he shouted "No fear!" when I asked him civilly if he would come home with me, and so we left them in their glory, and made our way into Christchurch Priory. There we were the unbidden witnesses of a very pretty wedding, which interested our girls immensely; but the boys were impatient of that solemn ceremony and wanted to be off up to the top of the tower. The bride was pretty and joyous, and looked up to her new husband as much as to say, "*Now* I've got you, my boy!" The husband looked serious as became the occasion. After the ceremony, which we sat through, was over, we submitted ourselves to the guidance of a learned little man who told us the whole story of that beautiful fabric, and the girls came away crammed full of the details of Norman architecture, whilst the boys climbed a winding staircase and lost themselves. We reached our home at 6.30 instead of 1.30, as we had promised, but it mattered not—there was no one there to receive us.

We had spent a happy day, which we all mean to remember as long as we live. Mean-

while, those other adventurers had been tossing on the bosom of the restless ocean. By the time they were off the Needles nine-tenths of the whole company were *hors de combat*; there was full occupation for steward and stewardess. Never, never again will any of the female portion of our explorers attempt to circumnavigate the Isle of Wight; they had quite enough of it yesterday.

Thus have I accounted for three bright days out of the ten I have been here; the others were deplorable. Now, as I am writing, on the eleventh day, a bitter wind is howling round the house, driving a storm of rain against the window. To-morrow we have, by the special invitation of a friend of the Major, another trout fishing expedition on hand in the North River. May the weather be more propitious!

On the North River.

Fine days are too precious to be wasted; they come only now and then, and when they do come they should be looked upon as "a boon and a blessing." If Thursday (August 20th) was a bad day, Friday was a good one, and we made the most of it. We availed ourselves of the invitation of the friend mentioned above to fish a lovely bit of the river Frome, or, rather, the North River. I must not name the spot; it

would be a breach of faith. I am afraid I cannot say anything about that day's fishing that would be instructive or even interesting to others, but to ourselves it was quite another matter.

Our host was just "A fine old English gentleman, one of the olden time," who "farms his own estate," and looks after it well—one who gives you a very hearty welcome, and makes you at home without ceremony or formality; one who says, "There is the river; it is full of big trout; go and catch them if you can." On a stretch of three miles or so, through his own land, he knows where every good fish lies. He came with us, not to fish but to show us where to fish—but trout are curious fish to deal with, both as to their uprising and their lying down; the river happened to be somewhat out of order, being very much above its normal depth owing to its temporarily receiving the influx of another stream above, on which sluicing repairs were going on. Consequently there was no rise, and as every dry-fly fisher knows, the great pleasure of that style of fishing is to see a good rise up the stream or away across yonder under the bank—then he has an object in view, something to aim at; his delight is to make a long cast and drop his allurement just above that widening circle, then he is pretty sure of his prey.

When trout are not rising it is sometimes weary waiting, and he is frequently tempted to try the other system of casting about promiscuously on the chance of finding a trout on the feed in some hole or stream or eddy. The Major is a rare hand at "waiting for a rise"—he thinks nothing of standing and watching for half an hour at a time for a fish to rise at a spot where he thinks he ought to rise, and when such a rise does appear it generally happens that the fish drops into his basket. We thought we were going to have a good day, when almost at the start the Major saw a rise and brought to grass a fine trout of 1 lb. 4 oz., but this happened to be his biggest catch during the day; for the reason I have already tried to explain, the water was not in a proper state, and so very little was done. The "A.A." got only one brace of ½ lb. trout, but he got them on the rise. The Major got three brace, so that so far as the mere catching of fish goes, we had nothing to boast of; but then I for one do not envy the man who goes to a riverside solely and wholly and with no other object in view than to catch fish. For my part, I like to catch them, but I love the pleasant music of a rippling stream, the songs of birds, the green meadows, the woods and the flowers, and if I catch no fish I am not inclined to cry *Perdidi diem!*

Then, again, this "fine old English gentle-

man" (who, by the way, is a Scotsman) had no intention whatever that we should be left alone to the catching of fish or the contemplation of nature on a vacuum. The morning and the evening were divided by noon and afternoon, and during this division of the time all of a sudden we came upon a lovely mansion, surrounded by woods and beautiful grounds. And then, somehow or other, by some sort of magic, we found ourselves sitting round a sumptuous table, laid out with admirable taste, and laden with every imaginable good thing, and our host, at the head of it, just as brimful of stories and of humorous jokes as a fine old English gentleman should be.

We fished again in the afternoon, and finally we were driven back to the station in proper style. For mere pleasurable enjoyment it was, indeed, a good day for us. The next day (Saturday, August 22nd) was another fine day, and we finished up the week—the lot of us, some twenty-two in number—by a picnic in the Chewton Woods, and gambols of all sorts down on the seashore. We had a merry time.

CHAPTER VI

MORE BIG CHUB

"Again, sometimes the day is sour,
And darkened is the sky;
Fair sport seems far beyond our power,
Though artful be our fly."

BLAKEY, *Fourteenth Century Fishing.*

September, 1903.

TWO lovely days in succession—August 31st and September 1st—led us rashly to conclude that summer weather had set in for good as our pleasant holiday drew to a close. On the 1st the Major went for a last visit to the Stour, and two of us went with him, but only as lookers-on. He fished for pike all the morning with poor success, getting only a few small jack. In the afternoon he settled down to the chub, and was soon rewarded with one of 3 lb., another 4 lb., and another 5 lb. These lively fish afforded excellent sport. If small chub of a pound or so

have no fight in them, this cannot be said of the big fellows. Having fed themselves fat and lived long in peaceful possession of the water, they have a decided objection to be disturbed. They do not and will not understand the meaning of a bit of white paste hooking itself into their leathern jaws, and they resent it with all their might; they dash up and down or make straight for the nearest bed of bulrushes. Failing in this they make a sudden dash for the punt; then it is no easy matter to keep the line tight, and if they do get under the punt, expecting to find safety and liberty there, they will bend the rod to its utmost elasticity without moving—the skill of the angler is tested, and his chance of success reduced to a minimum.

My respect for the chub has greatly increased by my recent experience of him; some day I may go so far as to say, "Let us cook and eat him." Izaak Walton gives full instructions as to the proper treatment, and then he will "eat well." I have never yet tasted chub; he is "objected against not only for being full of small forked bones, disperst through all his body, but that he eats waterish, and the flesh of him is not firm but short and tasteless." This description of him by the Master has perhaps been the cause of my prejudices. I am not going to quote Walton's prescription: you all know it. One point is that "he must be drest immediately

after he is taken"; in fact, that he must be kept alive till the pot is ready for him. The practice, as in Germany, of keeping fish alive in wells in the markets, perhaps for many days, does not seem to me to be the same thing as cooking them fresh from their native stream. Our chub, when caught in a punt, is consigned to the water-tank, and so preserved alive during the day—a prolongation of his life which, if there is any sentiment in him, can only be to prolong his misery. But enough of chub!

On the North River Again.

Wednesday, September 2nd, did not confirm our hopes as to the weather. On that day we resumed our acquaintance with the North River, and our experience, so far as it was controllable by ourselves, was much the same as that which I briefly described in the last chapter. The same kind hospitality, the same river, and, curiously enough, the same number of trout came into our baskets. The experience which neither we nor our host could control was that of the weather, and that was instructive if not agreeable.

Whether trout will or will not rise well in thunder weather is a problem not yet satisfactorily solved; there are some who insist that trout will rise and feed voraciously when thunder is roaring in the heavens and rain, with a mixture

of hail, is pelting the earth and raising great bubbles on the water. Our keeper is one who maintains this position because he can call to witness his eyes and his hearing. On the other hand, to go no further than our experience of to-day, we are obliged to say that during the whole of it we found the trout sluggish and motionless.

We began fishing at 10.30 a.m.; the atmosphere was heavy and leaden, with black clouds low down on the horizon. Guns at Portland were being fired constantly, but presently there was no mistaking the low grumbling in the distance which could not be mistaken for guns. Soon big drops began to fall, and then a small deluge through which we fished and fished for an hour or two with no success, and then with sodden feet we wearily tramped back to the welcome shelter of our host's residence. That was our first soaking.

After lunch the sky cleared a little and the rain for a time thinned down to a Scotch mist; sometimes even a small patch of blue appeared here and there between the rolling clouds. We sallied forth again, and by the time we had reached an open part of the river down came the rain in torrents, but we fished on in spite of it with mighty poor results for a couple of hours, and then, bedraggled and saturated, we betook ourselves to tea.

After tea we once more braved the elements, and started through the rain to the waterside. Our host and his nephew had accompanied us all day, and again were with us, not as anglers, but as "guides, philosophers, and friends," pointing out the pools where the big trout were, but now evidently hiding away from the reverberance of the thunder and the splashing of the rain. Our host, I may say, combines the activity of youth with the wisdom of old age; he complains of nothing but *annum Domini*; he puts me to shame by the activity with which he trots over the narrow planks which here and there cross the stream, while I have to balance myself with greatest caution and some anxiety, and certainly I cannot hop over the ditches as he does with a lightness of touch, which I can only envy but hardly imitate—but then, *annus Domini* is my ailment too!

Thus probably my last fishing day for this present A.D. came to an end in thunder, lightning, and rain. We had to catch our last train, and so drove off in all our bedraggled habiliments. The moon was shining brightly on the great Poole harbour as we sped along its margin, and the star-spangled, clear blue sky seemed quite innocent of the storm and the rain. I do not think that thunder weather is good for trout-fishing. It was a memorable day—in which we had three separate soakings, caught a few brace

of trout, and were very happy. I had a hot bath, and "so to bed," as old Pepys says.

In the New Forest.

Thursday, September 3rd, a gloomy morning, did not betoken a fine day for our last excursion. I was up early, as fresh as ever, and like the bright sky of last night, had already forgotten the storms of yesterday. The New Forest, for which we were bound, is all new to me. The gloom of the morning for once belied its promise of a bad day, for it proved to be one of the few ideally charming days this precarious season has bestowed upon us.

> "All is blue again
> After last night's rain,
> And the south wind dries the hawthorn spray."
>
> Browning.

We started, fifteen of us, for Bolderwood, one of the centres of the Forest most attractive and least accessible. Our drive through Ringwood was about twenty-two miles from our starting-point, and a delightful drive it was—sometimes through pine woods, sometimes over heather-clad downs commanding grand views all round. Our driver was not well acquainted with the windings and cross-roads of the Forest, and, missing the right turning, we were lost in the woods. Through the energy and activity of our

pioneer we soon found a road which brought us up to Bolderwood Lodge, which is occupied by one of the Forest keepers. There we put up our horses, and the first thing we did was to sit ourselves down on the grass under the greenwood trees and partake of the good things the fairies had provided for us—and were happy. Then the keeper's very pretty little daughter of seven, whose name is Gladys, volunteered to be our guide. She tripped and danced before us to show us the residence of the two great monarchs of the Forest, two celebrated old oaks, well known as the King and Queen. Ted, the family photographer, said he was sick of family groups, and vowed he would take no more, but he was finally coaxed into arranging the lot of us under the shade of Her Majesty the Queen, while the King, a few yards away, smiled upon us benignly; some of the boys had climbed up to the venerable fork, and their toes only will appear in Ted's picture, if it ever comes out, which is doubtful, as the group was rather unruly, and the sun had just hidden himself behind a mass of dark clouds. If there are any spots in the New Forest more picturesque than this which surrounds Bolderwood Lodge they must be very lovely, for there are the finest oaks and grand old beeches. I came upon a jolly old yew tree that might have been a fine young stripling when William Rufus hunted there. It measured seven

umbrellas, which I took to be about 17 ft. girth, but I cannot guarantee it exactly as it was but very roughly measured.

How the young folks did enjoy themselves, and what a job it was to get them together. We saw none of the deer which are frequently to be seen here about, but we saw a sight which equally surprised and terrified the girls and boys. The coachman drew up, and not far ahead of us we saw a rabbit, but it was a rabbit with a stoat clinging to his throat. The stoat quickly disappeared, but bunny lay gasping and struggling on the grass. The girls bemoaned his terrible fate, but the boys, young ruffians, were delighted to have caught a rabbit anyhow, as catapulting had not proved successful. The poor rabbit was soon put out of his misery, and left on the grass for the stoat to return to when we are out of sight.

We soon arrived, after a drive of some miles through the lovely beech woods of Mark Ash, at "The Cat and Fiddle," and whilst our young cormorants are again stuffing themselves with buns and bread and butter I may enlighten their ignorance and my own by telling them, in a few words, what the local guide-book tells about this wonderful Forest. It is said to be somewhat in the shape of a headless butterfly with its wings spread out. It is 21 miles in length from north to south, and 12 miles from east to west. It is 92,375 acres in extent, of which 27,638 acres are

private property. The remaining 64,737 acres are Crown lands—rather more than 100 square miles—the private property being just 43 square miles.

Three Men in a Punt.

Friday, September 4th—our last day! The Major and his two infant prodigies started off to fish for gray mullet and bass near the mouth of the Avon and Stour. They landed on a kind of desert neck of land which once upon a time formed the seashore, but is now the mouth of the river, the opposite side of which is another spit of land formed by the silting up of the sand, so creating a new barrier to the sea and extending the river for a considerable distance seaward. Here the tide and the rush of the river form a powerful stream, and in the middle of this stream is a certain deep pool, in which the mullet linger as they pass up with the tide, and here, almost in the middle of the river, our three fishermen are anchored, patiently casting their baits into the water and waiting for a bite. The sport is sometimes fast and furious, if you happen to hit the right time. The Major soon caught a fine mullet, and young Hercules hooked and punted a wriggling eel which frightened him—for he took it for a young python. Just as the sport was beginning, they heard the distant rumbling of

thunder, and as they were moored half a mile away from any shelter, the Major luckily took the hint; they landed, and running with all the speed they could muster along the desert shore, they reached the solitary little Sailors' Inn just in time before the rain came down in torrents, and so ended the angling expedition of these "three men in a punt."

CHAPTER VII

"THE SCHOOL OF THE WOODS"[1]

February, 1903.

"HE SCHOOL OF THE WOODS" is a very fascinating book. It compelled me to read it through at two sittings, and I propose now to tackle it again with the hope of giving my readers at least a rough idea of its contents. It must not be taken as *a review*, as such it should not find a place in this volume. I retain it on account of what seems to me to be the very interesting and amusing stories I have quoted. The author does not tell us precisely on what part of the globe it was that he studied the educational system carried on by the inhabitants of the woods; it may be safely inferred that it was somewhere away off in the backwoods of America, probably in the neighbourhood of the Rockies. Wherever

[1] "The School of the Woods: some Life Studies." By W. J. Long, Ginn and Co., 9, St. Martin St., London.

it was, he has gone through an endless variety of adventures, and he wields a facile and powerful pen in describing what he has seen and heard and done. Beyond the fact that he is an enthusiastic salmon and trout angler he killed nothing. He is a mighty hunter who goes forth not to kill and to destroy, but with an immense love of all animal life to study the animals in their native haunts. He is of opinion that animal education is like our own, and so depends chiefly upon teaching. He is convinced that instinct plays a much smaller part than we have supposed, and that an animal's success or failure in the ceaseless struggle for existence depends not upon instinct but upon the kind of training which the animal receives from its mother. This, as regards the animal world, is to most people a new doctrine. It was in order to study this interesting problem that he took infinite pains to get down to the very heart of it by spending days and nights for weeks and months in all seasons and in all weathers in the woods and on the great rivers and lakes, with the result that he has produced a book of marvellous observation and enthralling interest. It can scarcely be called a book for boys, though every healthy boy who once gets hold of it will not willingly let it go; every human being who takes any interest in the animal world will learn something from its pages. The same kind of school is kept by our own domestic

creatures at home. Our cat brings a mouse, and shows the kitten how to catch it. One often sees a thrush on our lawn teaching the young one to look out for worms. The great interest in this book lies in the study of this same education going on in the wildest and most inaccessible places of the earth. The best means of whetting the reader's appetite is to give a few quotations. I will now go through the chapters seriatim, and as far as space will permit give a specimen or two here and there:

Two Young Fawns.

"What the Fawns Must Know" is the title of Chapter I. Under a fallen tree two young fawns only a few days old are found lying very still and frightened just where their mother had hidden them when she went away. "Their beautiful heads were a study for an artist . . . and their great soft eyes had a questioning innocence as they met yours that went straight to yours." After petting them to his heart's content they staggered out up to their feet, and came out of their house. Their mother had told them to stay, but here was another big, kind animal whom they might trust.

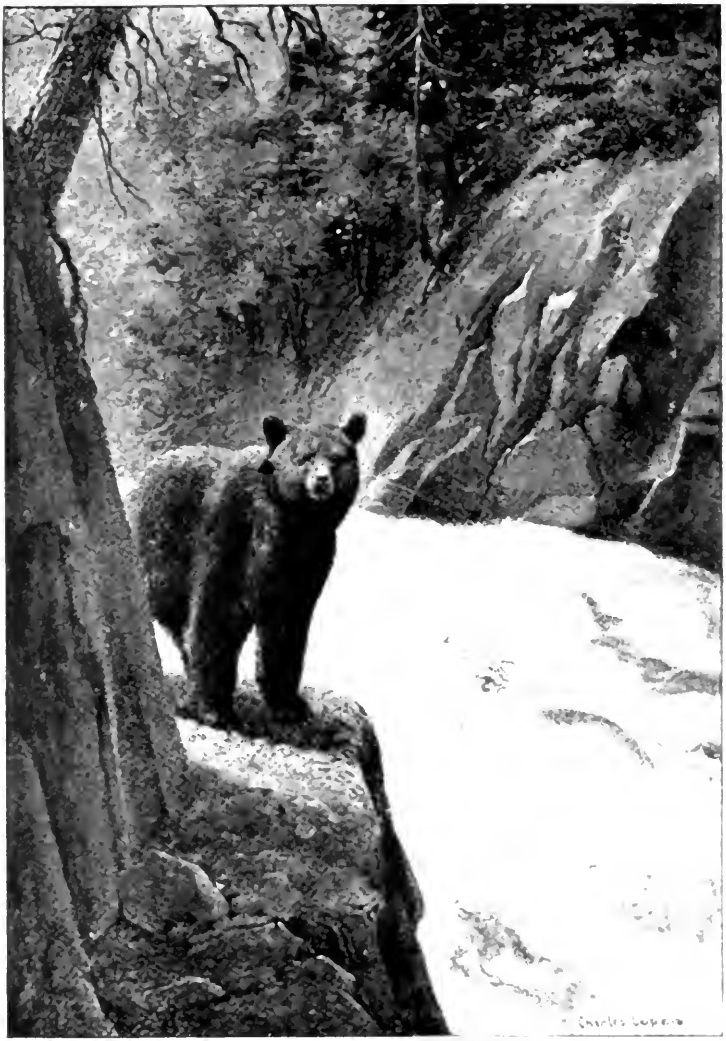
"They were still licking my hands, nestling close against me, when a twig snapped faintly far behind us . . . there was a swift rustle in the

underbrush, and a doe sprang out, with a low bleat as she saw the home log. At sight of me she stopped short, trembling violently, her ears pointing forward like two accusing fingers, an awful fear in her soft eyes as she saw her little ones with her arch-enemy between them, his hands resting on their innocent necks. Her body swayed away, every muscle tense for the jump; but her feet seemed rooted to the spot: she could not move, could not believe. Then as I waited quietly, trying to make my eyes say all kinds of friendly things, the harsh 'Ka-a-a-h! Ka-a-a-h!' the danger cry of the deer, burst like a thunder blast through the woods, and she leapt back to cover."

He got them back at last to their hiding place, and presently the doe returns.

"She bleated softly; the hemlock curtain was thrust aside, and the little ones came out . . . she rushed up to them, dropped her head, and ran her keen nose over them, ears to tail and down their sides and back again to be sure, and sure again, that they were her own little ones and were not harmed."

The rest of the story of these two little fawns can only be told in a few words. Though they looked alike at the first glance, it was soon found out that there is just as much difference in fawns as there is in folks. One of them was wise and the other foolish. One followed in the footsteps of his mother and was happy, the other came to grief because he followed his own wilful way, and



discovered too late that obedience is life; he started on his own course, and at last became the victim of a bear, and so vanished into the mystery and silence of the woods.

A Bear in your path when you are in pursuit of a twenty-five pound Salmon.

Leaving the educational methods of the bear and her cubs, I think the following story will be more interesting.

"One day, following a porcupine to see where he was going, I found a narrow path running for a few hundred yards along the side of the cliff, just over where the salmon used to lie, and not more than thirty feet above the swift rush of water. I went there with my rod, and without attempting to cast, dropped my fly into the current and paid out from my reel. When the line straightened I raised the rod's tip and set my fly dancing and skittering across the surface to an eddy behind a great rock. In a flash I had raised and struck a twenty-five pound fish, and in another flash he had gone straight down stream in the current, where from my precarious seat I could not control him. Down he went, leaping wildly high out of the water, in a glorious rush, till all my line buzzed out of the reel, down to the very knot at the bottom, and the leader snapped as if it had been made of spider's web.

"I reeled in sadly, debating with myself the unanswerable question of how I should ever have

reached down thirty feet to gaff my salmon had I played him to a standstill. Then, because human nature is weak, I put on a stronger, double leader, and dropped another fly into the current. I might not get my salmon, but it was worth the price of the leader just to rise him from the deeps and to see his terrific rush downstream, jumping, jumping as if the Witch of Endor was astride his tail in lieu of her broomstick. A lovely young grilse plunged headlong at my fly, and, thanks to my strong leader, I played him out into the current, and led him listlessly, all the jump and fight gone out of him, to the foot of the cliff. There was no apparent way to get down, so taking my line in hand I began to lift him bodily up. He came easily enough till his tail cleared the water . . . and then the fly pulled out, and he vanished with a final swirl and slap of his broad tail to tell me how big he was.

"Just below me a boulder lifted its head and shoulders out of the swirling current. With the canoe line I might easily let myself down to that rock and make sure of my next fish. Getting back would be harder, but salmon are worth some trouble, so I left my rod and started back to camp. It was late afternoon, and I was hurrying along the path, giving chief heed to my feet in the ticklish walking, with the cliff above and the river below, when a loud '*Hoowuff!*' brought me up with a shock. There at a turn in the path not ten yards ahead stood a huge bear, calling unmistakably halt, and blocking me in as completely as if the mountain had toppled over before me.

"There was no time to think, the shock and

scare were too great. I just gasped '*Hoowuff!*' instinctively, as the bear had shot it out of his deep lungs a moment before, and stood stock still as he was doing. He was startled as well as I; that was the only thing I was sure about.

"I suppose that in each of our heads at first there was just one thought—'I'm in a fix; how shall I get out?' . . . I met his eyes squarely with mine and held them, which was perhaps the most sensible thing I could have done though it was all unconscious on my part. In the brief moment that followed I did a lot of thinking. There was no escape up or down; I must go on or turn back. If I jumped forward with a yell, as I had done before under different circumstances, would he not rush at me savagely as all wild creatures do when cornered? No! the time for that had passed with the first instant of our meeting. The bluff would now be too apparent; it must be done without hesitation or not at all. If I turned back he would follow me to the end of the ledge. . . . Besides, it was dangerous walking, and I wanted a salmon for my supper. . . . All the while I looked at him steadily until his eyes began to lose their intentness. My hand slipped back and gripped the handle of my hunting knife. Some slight confidence came with the motion, though I would certainly have gone over the cliff and taken my chances in the current rather than have closed with him, with all his enormous strength in that narrow place. Suddenly his eyes wavered from mine; he swung his head to look down and up, and I knew that I had won the first move, and the path also if I could keep my nerve.

"I advanced a step or two very quietly, still

looking at him steadily. There was a suggestion of white teeth under his wrinkled chops; but he turned his head to look back over the way he had come, and presently he disappeared. It was only for a moment; then his eyes were poked cautiously by the corner of the rock. He was peeking to see if I was there still. . . . He was uneasy now; a low whining growl came floating up the path. . . . I began to talk to him, not humorously, but as if he were a Scotchman, and open to an argument. 'You're in a fix, Moween, a terrible fix,' I kept saying to him softly. . . . 'You have put me in a fix, too. Why don't you climb that spruce and get out of the way?' I have noticed that all wild animals grow uneasy at the sound of the human voice. . . . I have a theory also that all animals, wild and domestic, understand more of our mental attitude than we give them credit for. . . . Near him a spruce tree sprang out of the rocks. . . . Then an electric shock seemed to hoist him out of the trail. He shot up the tree in a succession of nervous, jerky jumps . . . and reached the level of the ledge above and sprang out upon it, where he stopped and looked down to see what I would do next. And there he stayed, his great head hanging over the edge of the rock and looking at me intently till I rose and went quietly down the trail."

The next chapter tells the story, and a most amusing one it is, of how *Quoskh, the Keen-eyed* (blue heron), brought up her children, and how she taught them to fish. After watching the method of feeding the young in a nest, and

describing all the manœuvres so far as they could be descried from a distance of the young ones being taught to fly, one day, when the mother had brought home some unknown small animal—a mink he thought—our author was led to undertake the difficult task of climbing the huge tree to the nest. He climbed up with difficulty to within ten feet of it; the surroundings were getting filthy and evil-smelling by this time, for *quoskh* teaches the young herons to keep their nests perfectly clean by throwing all refuse over the sides of the great home. He had to get round on to another branch, and when he looked up he saw three pairs of bright eyes watching down over their long bills, and he reached his hand to touch the nest.

"Then there was a harsh croak. Three long necks reached down suddenly over the edge of the nest on the side where I was; three long bills opened wide just over my head; and three young herons grew suddenly seasick, as if they had swallowed ipecac. I never saw the inside of that home: at the moment I was in too much of a hurry to get down and wash in the lake."

There is a long and most dramatic account of a battle between a big black wild cat and mother *quoskh*—in which the plucky cat loses one eye and then the other, and finally expires from her many wounds.

CHAPTER VIII

UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES

Saturday, July 2nd, 1904.

I WAS tempted for my health's sake to make a little excursion to occupy the following week—one day's trout fishing being included in my list of engagements. My ultimate destination was the River Teme, but in order to get there on the principle that "the farthest way round is the nearest way home," I entrained for Liverpool.

I found nothing to fish for in Liverpool, but I found the city quite alive and the principal streets being painted up and decorated, and immense preparations being made for the reception of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII, who will honour the city by a four hours' visit on July 19th. He is coming—I should say he is going there—to lay the foundation stone of the finest, the largest, the most substantial cathedral this great little island of

ours, swarming as it already does with great and ancient cathedrals, has ever yet produced, and indeed it will be one of the most imposing edifices in Europe, standing as it will on St. James's Mount, 155 feet above the river. Its two great towers will rear their lofty heads 415 feet above sea level.

It will, of course, take many years to build, and I shall never see it from sea or land. I was therefore well pleased when I was invited by one of my friends to visit the site. He has everything to do with the organization of the choir for the occasion, not the least of his difficulties being to select one thousand choristers out of four thousand applicants. Very substantial staging, forming a vast amphitheatre, was already nearly completed when I was there. The space allotted for my friend's choir forms a section of the amphitheatre immediately facing the daïs where the King will lay the foundation stone. The space allotted fort hese one thousand choristers is just sufficient to hold them standing up and packed together as close as herrings in a barrel. There they will have to stand for more than two hours without any covering, and they will have to sing under such a broiling sun as that we are now having, and may naturally expect to have on the 19th inst. The whole structure is built to accommodate six thousand spectators. I wish them all joy if

the sun shines, or if the rain pours down upon them!

I have been greatly impressed with the imposing grandeur of this triumph of modern Gothic architecture. The cathedral will stand in a clear and open space of twenty-two acres. It will possess not only the highest vaulted roof, but the highest twin towers in the country, the height from the ground being 260 feet, and above sea level 415 feet, its superficial area about 90,000 square feet, exceeding that of any other cathedral in the kingdom. Mr. Bodley, R.A., and Mr. G. Gilbert Scott are the joint architects. Its exterior will be full of originality, and really not the least feature will be its extraordinarily conspicuous position, for it will be the first object in the distance as seen alike by ships coming up from the sea and by travellers by road or rail.

My next stopping place was Church Stretton. This charming big village or little town is now in the full flush of greenery and flowers. It lies on the lap of the Stretton Hills—of the Longmynd range—and is faced by the classic hill known as Caradoc, where Caractacus defeated the Romans. I should much like to stay a month there to drink its wonderful waters and climb the surrounding hills, but it has one drawback—there is no river there. If such a river as the Teme ran along the valley where the noisy rail-

way now runs, it would be a perfect elysium for poor hard-worked weary pilgrims to renew their health on the hills and be happy by that pleasant river; but although there is no river, there is good fishing to be had not many miles away. I spent a day there and left it with regret. In the evening I entrained for Ludlow, and Thursday, July 7th, was the day arranged for our bit of private trout and grayling fishing. It was a splendid day, the first of the series of hot days we are just now having. We decided that to fish on such a day in a blazing sun would not be good for our health, and certainly not for our chance of catching any fish. We started, a nice little party of us—two fishermen, one lady, a nurse, and two children—a very promising lot for fish catching! We had a delightful tea under an old oak tree, strawberries and cream and all the other delectable things that go to make up a pretty picnic. That being over, the two anglers went to work. There was a big trout, a two-pounder, just under the bushes on our side. He could only be got at by a sort of dabbing process—that is, by dropping your insect very gently through the branches and broad green leaves, no easy task to perform without disturbing the trout. I did not attempt this cunning device, first, because it is not the sort of fishing that I like or approve of, and, secondly, because I should certainly have failed if I had made the

attempt. My brother angler is young and lissome, and can easily contort his limbs and body into any needful position to carry out his purpose, but with all his ingenuity, master trout would not be taken. He disappeared in the bank.

We followed the stream for a short distance, and then we descended a steep bank to a place where the position on our side left us free of the bank and overhanging trees behind us to cast over a wide spreading stream, where trout and grayling seemed inclined to rise, and doubtless would have risen freely but for causes hereafter suggested, and we looked for sport. Gradually and slowly the impression grew upon me that my olfactory nerves must be unnaturally quickened, or that something was wrong, and I observed to my companion that surely there must be some dead and putrefying animal in the immediate neighbourhood. We moved further down the river, but still this villainous smell pursued us. What could it be? It grew worse and worse as we proceeded. It was impossible to leave it behind, and equally impossible to live in it; we must give it up.

The solution was that the borough authorities, in their patriotic desire to free their beautiful river from all impurities, had recently spent many thousands of pounds in laying out a model sewage farm covering many acres of

meadowland on the opposite side of the river, and not sufficiently far away to prevent our getting the full benefit of the effluvium arising from it, as the wind happened to blow precisely across to us. I know nothing about the management of a sewage farm, but under ordinary circumstances I was under the impression that all objectionable smells were effectually nullified by certain antiseptic processes, which entirely counteracted putrefication.

The borough councillors—in their wisdom—seem to have adopted some new theory, supposed to be superior to any other, but which apparently did not work; the filtering machinery must have got choked, and one of the consequences has been that it became quite impossible to angle or even walk down either side of the lovely river when this wonderful sewage happened to be windward of it. It will probably cost the town some thousands to put this bad beginning right. The remedy has hitherto proved worse than the disease, for tainted air seems to me to be as bad as tainted water, or worse; from the former there is no escape when one is to windward, whichever way the wind blows, but one is not obliged to drink sewage water. I have only stated a fact, in no cavilling spirit. I sympathize with the local authorities for the great mistake they have made, and I am sorry for the ratepayers, who will have an additional

drain on their pockets, but it is better for them to suffer in this way than from the sort of drainage I have described.

It is needless to say that for ourselves we might have caught many fish but for this untoward circumstance. It seemed to me that the fish wanted to rise, but could not dare to put their noses outside the water on account of the horrible stench that pervaded the outer world. Better, far better, would it have been for this fine stream to have continued to receive the sewage of that old town, as it has done for many hundreds of years; the fish would have enjoyed it, and the river would probably be none the worse for the small body of sewage which it received and purified by its great volume as of yore. My young friend caught one trout and a brace of grayling, and I got one adventurous chub.

As we drove home late in the evening our pony sniffed, and sometimes seemed inclined to bolt from the tainted air, and as for me, I sometimes think that my nostrils are hardly yet free of the noisome stench. So ended my day's fishing, the only day I have had for many months.

CHAPTER IX

MAY FLY FISHING IN HEREFORDSHIRE IN 1905

"—After her came jolly June, arrayed
All in green leaves, as he a player were;
Yet in his time he wrought as well as played,
That by his plough-irons mote right well appear."

SPENSER.

THE RIVER ARROW

June 4th, 1905.

I AM now sitting in an old inn parlour, in one of the prettiest, old-fashioned villages to be seen anywhere. The view from the bridge, looking which way you will, up-stream or down-stream, is very attractive; it is pleasant to lean over the balustrades to watch the trout rising on a June evening. The bridge is just as it was when I first knew it seventy years ago. The broad expanse of water above and below, margined by trees now in their brightest foliage,

presents no change, though, doubtless, many an old tree has made way for one of younger birth; the old cottages have in some instances been replaced by new ones; some of the old black and white houses, notably the old vicarage, which is said to trace its ancestry to the thirteenth century, being freshly whitened and blackened, add greatly to the beauty of the village, and give it an air of smartness to which it was not so well entitled in the old days. My memory carries me back more particularly to the old schoolmaster, the patriarch of the village. He was a venerable old man when I first knew him, of medium height, square built, a broad and expansive forehead overshadowed a pair of merry gray eyes; he was an old boy of infinite wit and humour, and abounding in self-conceit. Everything about him and his surroundings were of the most optimistic order. His garden was the "frummest"[1] and most productive of any garden in the county, his peas and new potatoes the earliest and the best. He had been schoolmaster for fifty years when I first knew him about 1840—he lived on into the fifties, and I believe kept the school on to the end. He had educated children and children's children to the second or third generation, and it is needless to say they were all the best educated, could write the best hands,

[1] A local term for earliest.

unequalled by any other in the country. He was an exact prototype of Goldsmith's "Village Schoolmaster":

> "'Twas certain he could write and cipher too,
> Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage—
> And even the story ran that he could gauge."

But beyond all these accomplishments, and this is the point I have been aiming at, he was a *most expert angler*; he made his own flies, and of course no other could make flies like those of his make. I think it must have been his great skill and his wonderful success that first drew my boyish imagination in the way of fishing. It was to this old village, once reigned over by my old friend the schoolmaster, that we ("Piscator Major" and I) found our way on Saturday evening, June 3rd, for the purpose of testing the old river as to its May Fly capabilities.

This is not the first time we have fished in "The Arrow." In June, 1900, we (the Professor, the Major, and I) had a stretch of this river higher up. What we did on that occasion is fully described in my book, "An Old Man's Holiday," in the chapter entitled "In Pursuit of the May Fly."

We arrived at this old inn late in the evening; in the midst of a post-prandial repose we were aroused by the sudden apparition in our room of a remarkable spectre—not unlike the accom-

panying picture.[1] It is needless to say that the apparition somewhat startled us; however, when this garish furniture was removed from the

THE SPECTRE.

spectre's head, it revealed the very pleasant features of a young motor-carist and famous angler, who had called to welcome us, and to

[1] Kindly lent to us by the proprietors of the "Daily Graphic."

show us a basketful of splendid trout he had caught that day on our stream eight or ten miles farther up.

Instead of allowing us to begin our fishing on Monday morning on our own water, this young enthusiast insisted on our fishing *his* water. Accordingly, on Monday morning he appeared again, and motored us off ten miles away in no time. This good friend and another, between them, hold about three miles of the best fishing in the Lugg, up amongst the hills, and thither he had brought us. He and his friend had caught nineteen and a half brace there a few days ago, and he assured us that on Monday the Caddow would be in full feather, and our sport, experts as the Major and I had the reputation of being, was far beyond the region of doubt. He made us long for that morning with all the ardour of young sportsmen.

On Sunday afternoon we strolled by the river to look at our own water, which began about two miles down. Our first survey of the upper part of it on that lovely afternoon was inspiring to a degree. An evening to be remembered, on account of the fine weather and the glorious scenery around us, and, above all, for the intermittent rise of May Fly and the greediness with which sparrows, swallows, and trout devoured them, a sufficient indication, we thought, that the great rise had not yet commenced. I know

of nothing more enchanting than such a stroll on such a lovely evening. We almost regretted our promised visit to the Lugg on the next day, although we knew we were going to far more beautiful scenery, and to far more abundant fishing than we were likely to get here.

Monday morning, June 5th.—Arrived at last, and with it our motor-carist and jolly angling friend, and as I have said he whisked us off across country in almost no time, up among the hills to his water. The day was superb, the weather calm and cloudy, everything promised success. I am now scribbling these lines in a hut midway on the water, and the story I have to tell, being tired out after six hours' work, and while the others are still flogging the stream, is not one of unmixed success—such as we anticipated. The May Fly was only moderately represented, and the trout were not ardently desirous of being caught. They came short and wanted much catching.

I soon grew tired of the monotony of sitting in a hut by myself writing notes while the others were away up stream. They left me at five o'clock —six, seven o'clock came and they came not. Lame and footsore I took my rod, and on the way I saw a rise, away off down stream. I made the longest cast I ever made with my little "Leonard," and, to my surprise, he came at me. It really did require some manœuvring to bring

that fine trout up stream and into my basket, and I was glad, for hitherto I had done nothing to boast of. To sum up, the total result of this day's work of the *four* of us—for it is invidious to particularize—we had nineteen and a half brace, all fine trout; some of us thought we ought to have done better, but in a bright sunshine, wind north-east, May Fly, as we thought over, we had not much to complain of. I may say that nearly all were taken by the May Fly imitation and the Spent Gnat. Some I think were taken by the *Alder*.

The May Fly has behaved in a curious way on this river. One day before we went there it was up in abundance, and *two* rods took nineteen and a half brace, exactly the same number as our four had taken. The day we were there it could hardly be seen at all. Then, the Wednesday following our visit the May Fly was *up* again, and our friend got a large basket in an hour's evening fishing. As a matter of fact, we have hardly known, indeed we hardly know yet, whether in a particular district the May Fly has been up and done for, or whether the occasional insect one sees fluttering on the water is the precursor of a rise yet to come.

Tuesday, June 6th.—A Contrast.—Sunday and Monday were ideal June days, such as the poets write of. Tuesday was the reverse of all this. The night of Monday was frosty. This

morning, Tuesday, cold and damp. Yesterday we were all bright and joyous—to-day, dull and gloomy; the landlord grumpy, because we want him to drive us down to our water, and he wants to go somewhere else; the landlady anxious and worried for us to be off, so that the trap may be back for the other party. "Piscator Major" was silent and out of sorts, and the "A.A." was attacked with a fit of the spleen. *Yesterday!* glorious yesterday! He had been shot across the country in a grand motor, with the chauffeur for his gillie, who carried a chair to rest him when he felt fatigued, who carried also his net and his basket, who landed his trout and climbed trees for his flies. *To-day!* We were assured, and indeed we ourselves felt sure, with that cutting north-east wind there would be no rain to-day, so we left our wading boots and waterproofs at home. No sooner had we got to work than a cold, sleety rain came down, and continued all day. My one foot being crippled I could not wear my india-rubber boots except as a penitential torture. I had to hobble down for three miles, partly on one leg, laden with all my impedimenta—no boy to be found for love or money. The rain kept up a continuous drizzle—the stiles were abominable—no May Fly to be seen—no fish rising—feet and legs sopping in the wet grass—one brace of trout in my basket—tired, wearied, exhausted we reached the end

of our water, where our horse and trap were to be at eight o'clock! We had arrived at five! It was impossible, or at least unwise, to sit for three hours with sodden feet in the Red Lion's best parlour, so the good landlord, an old acquaintance of mine, hurried up a pony trap for us as quickly as possible, and sent us back home in a wretched, half-starved condition. We reached our inn in due course, where we found no worse adventure had happened than that young Curlyhead, of three years (evidently a born teetotaller!), had found his way into the cellar, and turned on the taps of three or four beer barrels—they were all flooding the cellar for half an hour before discovered. The Major, notwithstanding the bad weather, captured four brace of trout, and caught one cold. Our club water seems to be fair, but our first visit to it was unlucky.

CHAPTER X

AMONG THE RAINBOWS

"The sky perchance, looks fair and bright,
The breeze curls on the brook.
The waters ting'd to please the sight,
Trout waiting for the hook!"

R. BLAKEY, *Fourteenth Century Fishing.*

Wednesday, June 7th, 1905.

NOT a promising day—cold and cloudy. We found it necessary for our comfort to have a fire in our sitting-room, and we sat by it clearing off correspondence all the morning.

After luncheon we started with Mr. Roberts, who is forming, or, it should be said, has formed a very fine fish-breeding establishment in this neighbourhood, to fish about a mile of his water which he most kindly placed at our disposal. The ponds, covering about three acres of meadow land adjoining the Arrow, are not yet complete, but rapid progress is being made with them, and in a very efficient and workmanlike manner.

The part of it which interested me most, as a mere amateur, was a long stretch of deep water forming an oblong pond, well protected by gratings at both ends, through which a constant supply of water flowed in and out. In this pond were about 1,000 three-year old rainbow trout, very fine and healthy fellows. I suppose they would average about 1lb. each. A sight worth going a long way to see was their being fed —feeding the lions at the Zoo is nothing to it. Fancy, if you please, 1,000 big trout all making a dash at the meat as it is spooned out to them from a bucket. Every ladleful of food disappears in an instant, then they roam round about, backwards and forwards, always on the look-out for another ladleful. Although their dash made the water boil, there did not seem to be any fighting amongst them. Every one took his chance of getting what he could, and was satisfied. A few, however, bore marks of old wounds as though at some period of their existence, probably in the spawning season, there had been war among them.

My experience with rainbows was rather peculiar. A year ago Mr. Roberts had turned into the open river a number of yearling rainbows as an experiment, quite expecting that, according to tradition, they would soon disappear, and probably many of them had gone down the river on their usual exploring expedi-

tion. Fishing up stream I came upon some deep water at the foot of a weir. I cast an Alder across the foot of the pool—it was taken instantly by a fine trout, and then another, and another, and another, till I had landed five and lost two. These were all fine two-year-old rainbows; there are other trout of the old *régime*—big brown trout—in that pool, but not a rise of one of them could I get, though I fished it well from the tail to the fall of the water over the weir.

These rainbows, as I have said, had been put into the river lower down a year ago; they had full liberty to wander off seaward, as their habit is supposed to be, and they had *not* gone. Presumably they were well satisfied with the food they found in that pool, and so had no desire to go farther with the chance of faring worse. Their wandering habit may be thus explained.

Another characteristic of these rainbows is, that as yet, at all events, they are quite unsophisticated; they take the lure with perfect innocence, and one feels almost sorry that they should be so easily beguiled; but when once they wake up to the knowledge that there is something pricking and tugging at their lips or their throat, then the spirit within them is aroused, and they fight pluckily to the last gasp.

I have already expressed my admiration for "our village," and most of all for that picturesque

By permission of the Misses Barker.

SLACK HOUSE, EARDISLAND.

and venerable old *Staick House* with the weight of many centuries on its stout, black oak beams. To-day we were invited to luncheon in that old house, and so were afforded a glimpse of its interior, which is probably more interesting than the exterior, with its large low rooms and black oak beams across the ceiling. It contains, I fancy, a fine old library, but I had no time, being an angler and on angling bent, to examine any of those old books—probably there are some of value among them. A copy of "Eikon Basilikè," attributed to Charles the First, has probably been there since the time of that ill-fated monarch. It bears the date 1648. There were about fifty editions of it published in the year following the King's martyrdom (in 1649). Hume speaks of it as the "best prose composition which, at the time of its publication, was to be found in the English language."

Thursday, June 8th.—We start a-fishing with a cold north wind, angry and vile. We find our club water, two miles off, not good enough after Tuesday's experience. I blame not the water, which is all right, but the weather, particularly as by the unexpected kindness of a neighbouring gentleman, Captain S., we have a chance of catching fish just under our noses.

This morning we fished down his meadows, and spite of bad weather we got four brace during the day, and a fine luncheon thrown in. Why

does the wind always keep persistently in that cold quarter when I go a-fishing? What a yarn I should have to spin if the wind would let me!

Friday, June 9th.—This is our last day—fine and bright, wind north-east, and strong at that. I started off full of hope as usual, and I met disappointment on the way. May Fly is not yet over, or has it not yet begun? I observe to-day that whenever a stray one struggles up on the water it is quickly taken down by a trout, and yet it is in vain that one daintily puts one's fly within the spreading rings that rise has made. If the trout comes at you at all, he comes short; the cunning old brown trout has far too keen a perception of what is real and what is false. Now a rainbow, had one been there, would soon have fought himself into my basket. I had many a rise, but I caught nothing. I worked my way up to that grand pool where, on Wednesday, I caught five and lost two rainbows. To-day it was very exasperating, for although I am sure there are still many big fish in that pool, they were shy, and the small ones gave them no chance. No sooner had my fly touched the water than it was snapped up by one of these little pests; I caught a dozen of them, one after the other, and then I gave it up, for it is really quite heartrending to get the hook out of the gills, or sometimes the tongues, of these little innocents; to do it without injuring them in

some way is almost impossible, and they go back to the water with some injury to their health, never to be recovered. On the whole it is, perhaps, more merciful to kill them at once. But for this sentimental trouble I might, in an hour or two, have got hold of many a big one, but I forbore.

In the afternoon I strolled down by the river without my rod, the sun brightly shining, accompanied by our hospitable friend the Captain and his rod. Of course he knows every fish in his own water, but he could not get a rise.

The "Major" had started with me in the morning. We fished together for an hour. He then quietly suggested that I had better go on up stream, and he would follow. I did not see him again all day. I supposed he had gone off down the river for a last visit to his club water, but in fact he had followed me up on the other side, and had gone just above the weir I have mentioned, and there in the compass of two hundred yards he remained for several hours, and turned up eventually at our inn with a nice basket of trout, four brace of fish from $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. to $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb., a good average for this stream.

The Twa Dogs.

The Captain has a couple of dogs, one of them a large black spaniel, the other a yellow

Bedlington terrier—the latter had taken a special hatred or liking for moorhens; he was in and out of the water all the time, squeezing himself through impossible bushes and roots in the banks after one of these cunning birds; at length he found one. I saw the poor bird struggling to get out of his grip—he had got hold of her by the tip of one wing, but was prevented by the roots from getting a firmer hold. She eventually got clear of him, and then made very curious contortions, floating on her back with one wing up and the other in the water, pretending, as it seemed to me, to try to entice him after her, and probably away from a nest of young ones. She struggled in this apparently half-dead state some yards down the river, and when she saw him coming out of the bushes she suddenly became quite well, made a plunge into deep water and was gone. The Captain has named these two dogs after two celebrated assassins—and he called them indifferently by either name, to which they answered accordingly. One is named *Ravachol* (who threw a bomb into the French Assembly), and the other is delighted to be called *Czolgosz*, in happy ignorance that his namesake shot President McKinley.

I have just been reading that delightful book, Doctor John Brown's "Horae Subsecivae." I will finish my dog stories with just one quotation about *Rab*. You all know about "Rab and his

friends," but this is a story from "Our Dogs," of the same Rab, in his youthful days. Rab had made friends with Ailie, who had taken a splinter out of his foot, and through her had become friendly with James, and had accompanied him to Edinburgh.

"One morning James came home without him. He had left Edinburgh very early, and in coming near Auchindinny, at a lonely part of the road, a man sprang out on him, and demanded his money. James, who was a cool hand, said 'Weel a weel, let me get it,' and stepping back, he said to Rab, 'Speak till him, my man.' In an instant Rab was standing over him, threatening strangulation if he stirred. James pushed on, leaving Rab in charge; he looked back, and saw that every attempt to rise was summarily put down. As he was telling Ailie the story, up came Rab with that great swing of his. It turned out that the robber was a Howgate lad, the worthless son of a neighbour, and Rab knowing him had let him cheaply off; the only thing, which was seen by a man from a field, was, that before letting him rise he quenched (*pro tempore*) the fire of the eyes of the ruffian, by a familiar Gulliverian application of Hydraulics which I need not further particularize. James, who did not know the way to tell an untruth, or embellish anything, told me this as what he called 'a fact *positeevely*.'"

My chief regret about this little expedition is that, owing to the great kindness of our friends and neighbours, we have been quite unable to do

justice to the club water, which was our first point of attraction. We only visited it once, and then under very adverse circumstances.

On the Corve.

On *Saturday, June 10th*, we regretfully took our departure for the picturesque old town of Ludlow. There we remained in peace and quietness till Monday. As our train for London was to leave at 3.10 p.m., we had all the morning before us. What better could we do than go a-fishing? We soon got permission to fish on *The Corve*—an opportunity not to be lost. Provided with an ample luncheon, in a special basket, we had to travel a mile or two to get to this water, of all rivers—at any rate in this part—the most impracticable for fly fishing—scarcely an opening for casting anywhere, and equally impracticable for wading. Wind as usual, north-east, threatening rain. I did not take my rod; the Major had it all to himself, I looked on.

After following him for some distance, I was obliged, from lameness, to sit me down on the stump of a fallen willow, and employ myself in taking note of my surroundings. The Major has gone on up. I hope he will find some better water; as yet scarcely a rise has he seen. There are big trout, undoubtedly, in this tantalizing little stream, but to-day they won't show up.

I have often been told that cuckoos never sing on the wing, and I have as often been obliged to contradict that statement. I have seen and heard them too often to accept it as true. Now comes another proof. Yonder are three cuckoos together (an unusual sight) flying across the meadow, not far away, one of them cuckooing all the time. This beautiful bird with the monotonous song is, as you all know, "often heard, but seldom seen"; I was, therefore, glad to see them. It seemed to me as they swung swiftly along that they considered "Two are company, but three are none," for one of the three looked much like an intruder. What a clamour the birds are making in the woods! Just here, in the bushes, a little mother wren is teaching her brood of twittering young ones how to fly; it is a pretty sight when they are good enough to give me a peep at them. A *quist* is coo-cooing in the elm above my head, unaware that I am underneath taking notes. Chaffinches are "chirping their solemn matins on each tree," young thrushes just fledged, imprudent in their innocence, come close up to me, wondering what sort of two-legged creature I may be. Old thrushes are almost too noisy, "warbling their native wood-notes wild"—it is all very pleasant, but time, like the birds, is on the wing.

Where are the magpies? when I was a boy

they were as plentiful as blackberries, but on this outing I have not seen a single specimen—perhaps it is well that I have not seen *one* alone, if the old saying is true—

"One, sorrow;
Two, mirth;
Three, a wedding;
Four, death."

This has been "proved to be true" by the fact that a man on his way to be married, travelling on a coach top, to claim his bride, saw three magpies flying across the road!

I wonder what has become of the Major. I am obliged to act as a sort of timekeeper for him, and to keep that terrible train constantly in mind —I know he will miss it if he can.

He came back at last without any success, much to his disappointment. We hurried back, we caught the 3.10 p.m., and here we are. Our May Fly, everybody's May Fly fishing for the year 1905 must now be considered as over, and I do not think, on the whole, that it can be regarded as having been a good year, though we got much pleasure out of it. We tore ourselves away from the pleasant fields and rivers and many kind friends, and we felt like schoolboys going back to school.

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THE YOUNG COON.

"Like a flash another young coon appeared on the scene."

To face p.

CHAPTER XI

"A LITTLE BROTHER TO THE BEAR"[1]

February, 1904.

HERE I venture again to introduce another book by the same author as that quoted in Chapter VII—not as a *review*, but because I think the stories quoted will prove of interest to my readers. It is a veritable brother of the same school. The author's observations cover a period of some thirty years, so he tells us, from the time when he first began to prowl about the home woods with a child's wonder and delight, to his last hard winter trip into the Canadian wilderness. All the sketches and observations are mainly from his own notebooks or from his own memory. The more he has investigated the habits and manners and customs of the wild animals and birds of the woods, the more in-

[1] "A Little Brother to the Bear, and other Animal Stories." By William J. Long, Ginn and Co.

tensely interesting has he found them. Some individual animals and birds of the same species seem to possess a special and an acute intelligence that lifts them enormously above the level of their fellows—just, I suppose, as there be degrees of dullness, cunning, and intelligence among humans—and of these he gives many amusing instances; it may be said that whilst making these investigations he has had in mind these two things—the new facts that he has discovered, and the interpretation thereof, and he makes it evident that there is still very much to be learned from them, and that we are not quite through with them when we have cried instinct and named their species, nor altogether justified in killing them industriously off the face of the earth. Beneath their fur and feathers is their life; and a few observers are learning that their life also, with its faint suggestion of our own primeval childhood, is one of intense human interest. Some of them plan and calculate, and mathematics, however elementary, is hardly a matter of instinct; some of them build dams and canals; some have definite social regulations; some rescue comrades; some bind their own wounds, and even set a broken leg, as will be seen in the instances which I will quote.

"The Little Brother of the Bear"—Mooweesuk, as the Indians call him—is the coon, and an amusing, greedy, plucky little wretch he is.

He is a sleepy-head, and snoozes all day. He never comes out of his retreat, mostly in a hollow tree, till dark, and goes in again before daylight, so it is not easy to find out where he lives. He has a curious habit of washing, or rather of sousing, everything he catches in water. No matter what he finds to eat—mice, chickens, roots, grubs, fruit, everything, in fact, but fish—he will take it to water, if it be anywhere near a pond or brook, and souse it thoroughly before eating. Once our author saw mooweesuk sitting on a rock by a trout brook diligently sousing something that he had just caught. He crept near on all fours to the edge of an old bridge, when the logs creaked, and mooweesuk looked up from his washing. He left his catch on the instant, and came up the brook, part wading, part swimming, put his forepaws on the low bridge, poked his head up over the edge, and looked at him steadily. He disappeared after a few moments, and on turning round, there he was, his paws up on the other edge of the bridge, looking back at the queer man-thing that he had never seen before. The game that he was washing was a big frog. After a few moments he circled the bridge, grabbed his catch, and disappeared into the woods. He always comes in the face of danger or death to the cry of distress from one of his own kind.

Once, near midnight, in the month of Novem-

ber, the dogs had treed a coon, and by the aid of a great fire our author was trying "to shine his eye"—that is, to locate his game in the tree tops by the fierce glow of his eyes flashing back the firelight. It was seen at last, and one of the hunters climbed the tree and tried to poke the coon from his perch with a stout pole. Instead of doing as was expected of him, mooweesuk, who is always cool in the face of any danger, came swiftly along the limb showing his teeth, with a snarl in his nose that was unmistakable. The hunter dropped his pole, pulled a revolver from his pocket, and shot the coon, which in a sudden rage turned and leaped for the howling dogs forty feet below. In a flash there was a terrible fight on—mooweesuk, backed up against a tree, began the cool, swift snaps and blows that took all the courage out of half his enemies. Now a dog was disabled by a single wolf grip on his sensitive nose, now a favourite drew back howling, half blinded by a lightning sweep across both eyes. But the dogs were too many for any one fighter, however brave. They leaped in upon mooweesuk from the sides, and two powerful dogs stretched him out; then, knowing that his fight was almost lost, he twisted his head and gave a sudden fierce cry—the help call—entirely different from his screech and snarl of battle. Like a flash another young coon appeared on the scene, leaping from the tree top and hurling

himself into the fight, clawing and snapping like a fury and sending out his battle yell. He threw himself upon the dog that held the first coon's neck, and crushed a paw with a single grip of his powerful jaws; then the bigger coon was on his feet again fighting feebly. The owner of the dogs started for the fight swinging a big club, then drew back ashamed. "Save him," was whispered, "the little fellow deserves his life." "Drag off the dogs!" he roared. Every hunter understood. The dogs were dragged away by tails and legs; the big coon lay down quietly to die, but the little fellow put his back up against a rock and snarled his defiance at the whole howling mob, and there he stayed till the hunter took a pole and drove him, still protesting savagely, into another tree where the dogs could not get at him.

The Woodcock, or whitooweek the hermit, as the Indians call this singular bird—the strangest hermit in all the woods, a bird of mystery. Our author gives a very interesting account of his habits; he spends all the sunny hours in the dark woods, and only stirs abroad in the soft twilight. "Of a hundred farmers," says he, "on whose lands I have found whitooweek, or the signs of his recent feeding, scarcely five knew from observation that such a bird existed, so well does he play the hermit under our very noses." More than forty pages of good reading

are devoted to whitooweek, and then we come to *a woodcock genius*, who doctors his own broken leg. This astonishing surgical skill is, as our author says, "probably the discovery of one or two rare individuals here and there more original than their fellows." It may be, however, that a

WOODCOCK MENDING HIS BROKEN LEG.

woodcock must have his leg broken before he has occasion to show the natural resources that are in him. One day, while sitting quietly by a brook, a woodcock fluttered out into the open and made his way to a spot on a bank of light, sticky mud and clay. The bird was acting strangely in broad daylight, and our author could see him plainly. At first he took soft clay in his

bill from the edge of the water, and seemed to be smearing it on one leg near the knee. Then he fluttered away on one foot for a short distance, and seemed to be pulling tiny roots and fibres of grass, which he worked into the clay that he had already smeared on the leg. Again he took more clay and plastered it over the fibres, putting on more and more till the enlargement could plainly be seen, thus working away for fully fifteen minutes. Then he stood perfectly still for a full hour under an overhanging sod, his only motion being an occasional rubbing and smoothing of the clay bandage with his bill, until it hardened enough to suit him, and then he disappeared in the thick woods. The woodcock had a broken leg, and had deliberately put it into a clay cast to hold the broken bones in place until they should knit together again. This at all events was our author's full belief, confirmed by the opinion of many gunners who had frequently shot birds whose legs had at some time been broken and had healed again perfectly straight, and he was fully confirmed a long time afterwards as to the truthfulness of his opinion. A friend shot a woodcock, which on being brought in by the dog, was found to have a lump of hard clay on one of its legs. He chipped the clay off with his pen-knife and found a broken bone, which was then almost healed and as straight as ever.

This, be it remembered, occurred in the backwoods of Canada. It would be curious to learn if any sportsmen or naturalists in our island have ever noticed a surgical operation of this kind, which surely indicates a scientific knowledge beyond the reach of mere instinct.

The Kingfisher's Kindergarten.—Koskomenos, the kingfisher, "still burrows in the earth like his reptile ancestors," and other birds will have nothing to do with him, but he cares little for that, being a clattering, rattle-headed, self-satisfied fellow, who seems to do nothing all day but fish and eat. He is plucky and pugnacious. Our author—who seems always to have an eye for what is strange or new in the habits of all wild creatures—says that one day under his very eyes he saw a kingfisher drive off a mink and almost kill the savage creature, and at page 180 there is a lovely picture of the encounter.

The story of how the old birds educated the young ones in catching minnows is too good and quite too long to quote. In the first lesson the young ones—five of them—are seen sitting in a row on a branch overhanging the water, and the old ones stuff them with minnows; then the old ones, by way of going a stage further, find a pool quite shut off from the main stream in which they had deposited a dozen minnows for the young to practise their skill upon. Koskomenos, on the Canadian rivers, is a solitary fellow, with

few pleasures and fewer companions to share them with him. This is doubtless the result of his peculiar fishing regulations, which give to each kingfisher a certain piece of lake or stream for his own. Only the young of the same family go fishing together—that seems to be the law on the lakes and rivers of the far west, possibly the same unwritten law prevails amongst our own kingfishers, for certainly they are solitary birds on our rivers.

The charm of this "hunter without a gun" is that he prowls about in the night-time in the great backwoods, not to kill and destroy, but lovingly to watch and find out the secrets of the inner lives of the denizens of the forest; and he finishes his book by saying that "the very best thing that can be said of the 'hunter without a gun' is 'that the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for him,' for something of the gentle spirit of Saint Francis comes with him, and when he goes he leaves no death, nor pain, nor fear of man behind him."

CHAPTER XII

THE FISH AND THE RING AND OTHER SCRAPS FOR CHRISTMAS

THE legend of the fish and the ring is said to be common enough, and is of great antiquity; it is mentioned in the Koran:—"Solomon entrusted his signet with one of his concubines, which the devil obtained from her, and sat on the throne in Solomon's shape. After forty days the devil departed, and threw the ring into the sea. The signet was swallowed by a fish, which, being caught and given to Solomon, the ring was found in its belly, and thus he recovered his kingdom."

Professor de Morgan told the story in "Notes and Queries" of a recovered ring, wonderful as that of Solomon. A servant boy was sent into the neighbouring town with a valuable ring. He took it out of its box to admire it, and in passing over a plank bridge, he let it fall on a muddy bank. Not being able to find it, he ran away,

took to the sea, finally settled in a colony, made a large fortune, came back after many years, and bought the estate on which he had been servant. One day on walking over his land with a friend, he came to the plank bridge, and there told his friend the story. "I could swear," said he, pushing his stick into the mud, "to the very spot on which the ring dropped." When the stick came back, the ring was on the end of it.

In Brand's "History of Newcastle" occurs the following ring story: "A gentleman named Anderson, fingering his ring as he was one day standing on the bridge, dropped the bauble into the Tyne, and of course gave it up as lost. After some time a servant of this gentleman bought a fish in Newcastle Market, in the stomach of which the lost ring was found."

Now let me tell a story the truth of which I can absolutely vouch for, seeing that the ring was my own. I was trout fishing in a boat on a large lake, not far away from Aldershot. Lady S. was rowing. I hooked and landed a nice trout in the boat. After releasing him from the hook I put both hands over the side to wash off the slime of the fish, and in doing so my signet ring—a valuable and much valued ring—slipped off my middle finger into the water, ten feet deep, and into a bottom layer of mud. We marked the spot as well as we could, it being far out from the shore. So far the loss of the ring is certain. I wish I

could complete the story by telling of its recovery. I can but hope that some good fairy or water-nymph will some day put it into the mouth of a big trout, that Lady S., who casts a fly admirably, will catch that trout, and that her cook will find in his interior that solid gold ring, and that so, some day or other, it may find its way back to the middle finger of the left hand of the present writer!

There is a sort of psychical sentiment about a ring which one has worn for thirty years and more—the gift of a dear old lady, long since departed. A glance at it, when I had it, and the thought of it, now I have lost it, has oftentimes brought to mind pleasant memories of pleasant things in bygone days, which would otherwise not have been remembered. A glance at that ring always called up a pretty picture of a niece of mine, a charming young girl of seventeen, feeding a pair of young doves on a lawn at an old farm-house. She admired my ring, then a new one. Where is she now? she married, she went to Australia, she had two sons—the elder, a youth of twenty, volunteered to go out to the Boer War. He distinguished himself, and gained the D.S.O. He returned home to find his mother dying. She died two years ago. I am still waiting for that big trout to swallow my glittering ring—and then![1]

[1] Whilst preparing this sheet for press I have by chance received this cutting from a local newspaper. It affords

Catching Fish with their own Teeth.—Giannetazzio writes on the mode of catching the "belone," or garfish, in the Mediterranean by means of its own teeth. The instruments are made at Naples, and its capture successfully practised there:

further evidence that fish have a decided *penchant* for gold rings; and inspires me with higher hope that my own lost ring will some day come back to me:

"DIAMOND RING FOUND IN A FISH—A PORTISHEAD INCIDENT.

"For years there have been fine grey mullet in the Portishead dock, which is opposite to and receives water from the silvery Severn, and the people have been fishing there most days, their catches varying in number and size, the largest known weighing eight or nine pounds.

"A good sized fish recently landed by a local amateur, in humble circumstances, was taken home and without anything unusual being noticed it was put in the larder.

"Some time later, when the man's wife came to prepare the fish for the table, she found it had swallowed not only bait, but also a diamond ring, which people who have seen it declare to be worth from £25 to £30.

"In Bristol, when the incident of the finding of the ring in the fish was reported, it was stated that a gentleman, while boating recently off the coast between Portishead and Weston-super-Mare, had lost a diamond ring, which it was suggested might be the same as the one found in the fish at Portishead. But no description of the ring was forthcoming. The incident was regarded as being perfectly natural, and the gentleman said he had known of a watch of moderate size being found in the stomach of a hake."

" Burnished with blue, and bright as damask steel,
Behold the Acus tribe with pointed bill,
All fringed with teeth; no greedier fish than they
Ere broke the serried lines the foaming bay.
Soon, as the practised crew this frolic throng
Beholds advancing rapidly along,
Adjusting swift a tendon to the line,
They throw—then drag it glistening through the brine,
Anon the lure the greedy fish pursue;
The gristle charms, but soon its charms they rue,
Fixed by the teeth to that tough barbless bait,
They struggling yield to suicidal fate."

While skating on a lake at Danbury, Connecticut, a young lady lost a valuable jewelled locket, which fell through a hole in the ice. A week later she went to the refrigerator in her home, and, taking out a piece of ice, was astonished to see the lost locket in the middle of it.

Fishing in Holland in 1603.—" Where there is nothing but ditches, and canals, and sluices, and sand-banks, and dykes, and windmills, it does seem somewhat miraculous that anything spiritual could be imparted to an art, which must, in such localities, be stripped of those necessary accessories to sentiment and feeling—the undulating landscape and the rippling, limpid stream. But, strange to say, the Dutch have displayed a genius of their own in reference to fishing. They have been clever and amusing caricaturists of it. It must be borne in mind that this part of Europe has always been and is yet famous for its salmon. Fishing, therefore,

both for this monarch of the streams and less valuable sport, has been commonly practised for several centuries among a large class of the people both for pleasure and amusement. There is a common proverb that Amsterdam is built upon the bones of fish. In 1613 we have in Dutch the 'Handbook of Fishing' (Amsterdam), in which the act is described, and plates of the several kinds of fish are given. The earliest caricatures of the angler we have seen bear the date 1603. One represents a Dutch amateur, evidently of some public notoriety, sitting like a lubberly clodpole with the most bewildering expression of face, pulling a prodigious large sal mon at the foot of a weir; in another print figures a fisher weeping for the loss of a part of his rod and tackle. Underneath the print are some verses, which may be paraphrased thus:

"Mynheer Vandunk, though he never got drunk,
Sipp'd brandy, and angled gaily;
And he quenched his thirst with two quarts of the first,
Hooking lots of fine salmon daily;
Singing—'Oh, that a fisherman's draught could be
As deep as the rolling Zuyder Zee.'

"Water well mixed with spirit good store
No fisherman thinks of scorning;
But of water alone he drinks no more
Than to help him to bring his fish on shore
Upon the market-stall in the morning.
For a fishing Dutchman's draught should be
As deep as the rolling Zuyder Zee."

The Rev. Dr. Beecher, of New York, as an Angler.—I am not quite sure whether this is the celebrated Dr. Henry Ward Beecher or one of his brothers. Mr. Robert Blakey quotes him as having recently (that is in 1853) written a series of delightful papers in the "New York Independent" on his favourite amusement of angling. Mr. Blakey devotes about seven pages to him. From these pages I will select a few choice bits.

"Still further north is another stream, something larger, and much better or worse, according to your luck. It is easy of access and quite unpretending. There is a bit of a pond some twenty feet in diameter, from which it flows, and in that there are five or six half-pound trout, who seem to have retired from active life and given themselves to meditation in this liquid convent. They are very tempting, but quite untemptable. Standing afar off we selected an irresistible fly, and with a long line we sent it pat into the very place. It fell like a snowflake. No trout should have hesitated a moment. The morsel was delicious. . . . We cast our fly again and again; we drew it hither and thither; we made it skip and wriggle; we let it fall plash like a surprised miller, and our audience calmly beheld our feats. . . . Again changing place, we will make an ambassador of a grasshopper.

"*Catching Grasshoppers.*—That is in itself no slight feat. The first step you take at least forty bolt out and tumble headlong into the grass;

some cling to the stems, some are creeping under the leaves, and not one seems to be in reach. You step again; another flight takes place, and you eye them with a fierce penetration as if you could catch some one with your eye. You cannot though. You brush the grass with your feet again. Another hundred snap out, and tumble about in every direction. At length you see a very nice young fellow climbing a steeple stem. You take good aim and grab at him. You catch the spire, but he has jumped a safe rod. Yonder is another, creeping among some delicate ferns. With broad palm you clutch him and all the neighbouring herbage too. Stealthily opening your little finger you see his leg; the next finger reveals more of him; and opening the next you are just beginning to take him out with the other hand, when out he bounds and leaves you to renew your entomological pursuits. Twice you snatch handfuls of grass, and cautiously open your palm to find that you have only grass. It is quite vexatious. There are thousands of them here and there, climbing and wriggling on that blade, leaping off from that stalk, twisting and kicking on that spider's web, jumping and bouncing about under your very nose, hitting you in your face, creeping on your shoes, and yet not one do you get. If any tender-hearted person ever wondered how a humane man could bring himself to such cruelty as to impale an insect, let him hunt for a grasshopper on a hot day among tall grass, and when at length he secures one, the affixing him upon the hook will be done without a single scruple, and as a mere matter of penal justice and with judicial solemnity."

Having at length succeeded in catching a grasshopper, the good doctor goes on to tell what further happens. The trout are yonder, he swings his line in the air, gives it a gentle cast towards the desired spot, and a puff of south wind dexterously lodges it in the branch of a tree, and no gentle pull will loosen it. He draws it north and south and east and west; he gives it a jerk and a pull down; he coaxes it in this way and solicits in that way in vain; he stops a moment to look at the trout and then at his line. Was there anything so vexatious? Would it be wrong to get angry? In fact he feels very much like it. The very things he wanted to catch—the grasshopper and the trout—he could not, but a tree that he did not want he caught fast at the first throw! He cautiously draws near and peeps down. Yes, there are the trout looking at him, and laughing as sure as ever trout laughed. But now, having rigged up afresh, he begins to fish—just here the water is mid-leg deep. Experimenting at each forward reach for a firm foothold, slipping, stumbling over some uncouth stone, slipping on the moss of another, reeling and staggering, he says he had a fine opportunity of testing the old philosophical dictum that "one can think of but one thing at a time." One *must* think of half a dozen—of your feet, or you will be sprawling in the brook; of your eyes and face, or the branches will

scratch them; of your line, or it will tangle at every step; of your far distant hook, or you will lose the end of all your fishing. At first it is a puzzling business, but a little practice sets all things right.

With a fresh supply of grasshoppers he lands, after many adventures, several trout, and finishes up by letting his line run on before him, wading along, holding on by this branch, fumbling with his feet along the jagged channel, changing hands to a bough on the left side, leaning on that rock, stepping over that stranded block of timber. Ripping a generous hole in his skirt, he comes to the edge of a petty fall. He steps down, thinking only of how to keep his balance, and not at all of the depth of water; he splashes and plunges down into a basin waist deep. The first sensation, he says, of a man up to his vest pockets in water is peculiarly foolish, and his first laugh rather faint, and he is afterwards a little ashamed of the alacrity with which he scrambles for the bank. While he is in this scrape at one end of his line, a trout has got into a worse one at the other. In his surprise he comes near losing him in the injudicious haste with which he overhauled him. All this reminds me of the river Barle, where I have gone through similar troubles.

Dr. Johnson on Angling.—Mr. Robert Blakey thus commences Chapter IX of his book: "Dr.

Johnson's famous definition of an angling rod, which we have not been able to see in any old folio edition of his dictionary, has long been a standing joke against anglers, 'that it was a stick with a fool at one end and a hook at the other.'" It is a curious fact that no one has ever yet been able to point out this saying in any work of Johnson's, and the late Dr. Birkbeck Hill, whose mind was saturated with Johnsonian literature, has stated that he had never found it. Johnson of course was not an angler, but certainly he was a profound admirer of Izaak Walton. Curiously enough, on p. 204 of Mr. Blakey's book I find the following quotation: "La ligne est un instrument où il y a une bête à chaque bout—*Ancelot L'Homme du Monde.*"[1] This quotation heads a chapter on "L'Art de la peche a la ligne" in the celebrated work of Monsieur Colnet, called "L'Hermite de Belleville." This work was published in Paris in 1815, but the above chapter heading from Ancelot was doubtless of a much earlier date.

[1] See also "Walton and some Earlier Writers on Angling." By R. B. Marston. London, Elliot Stock.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW HIAWATHA SLEW THE "KING OF FISHES"

(*Borrowed from Longfellow*)

"THE SONG OF HIAWATHA" is probably known to most of my readers, but it struck me that a short epitome of the story and a few extracts from the chapter on fishing may serve to refresh the memory of those who have read it in bygone days, and be of passing interest to those who have not.

Hiawatha was a personage of miraculous birth, who was sent among the North American Indians to clear their rivers, forests, and fishing grounds, and to teach them the arts of peace. The scene of the poem is among the Ojibways, on the southern shore of Lake Superior. As the story is easily convertible into prose, I shall string my extracts together by prose mostly in the words of the poem.

"Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple, who have faith in God and nature, listen to this simple story; ye who sometimes in your rambles, through the green lanes of the country, read this song of Hiawatha." Wenonah the beautiful was the daughter of Nokomis. Her mother had warned her not "to stoop down among the lilies, lest the West Wind, Mudjekeewis, should come and harm her." But she heeded not the warning, and the West Wind came at evening and found the beautiful Wenonah; he wooed her with his words of sweetness, till she bore a son in Sorrow—

Thus was born the child of wonder, Hiawatha, but his mother died, deserted by the false and faithless West Wind, and the wrinkled old Nokomis nursed the little Hiawatha, and brought him up. Once the little boy saw the moon rise from the water, and whispered, "What is that, Nokomis?" and she answered:

> "Once a warrior, very angry,
> Seized his grandmother, and threw her
> Up into the sky at midnight;
> Right against the moon he threw her,
> Up into the sky at midnight;
> 'Tis her body that you see there."

Time passed, Hiawatha became a man, and he determined to build himself a light canoe that should float upon the river like a yellow leaf in autumn. So he went to the Birch-tree,

HIAWATHA: "TAKE MY TAIL, O STURGEON NAHMA"

and said, "Give me of your bark, O Birch-tree," and the tree with all its branches, rustled in the breeze of morning, saying, "Take my cloak, O Hiawatha!" Then he called upon the Cedar, "Give me of your boughs, O Cedar! my canoe to make more steady," and the terrified cedar whispered, bending downward, "Take my boughs, O Hiawatha!" Then he went to the Larch-tree, and the Fir-tree, and last of all to the Hedgehog for quills to make a girdle for his beautiful boat, and so the birch canoe was builded in the valley by the river, and it floated like a yellow water-lily, and Hiawatha sailed down the rushing Taquamenah, and cleared its bed of root and sandbar.

And now we come to the time when Hiawatha went a-fishing. He went

> "Forth upon the Gitche Gumee,
> On the shining big sea water,
> With his fishing line of cedar
> Of the twisted bark of cedar,
> Forth to catch the Sturgeon Nahma,
> Mishe-Nahma, King of Fishes,
> In his birch canoe exulting
> All alone went Hiawatha.
> Waited vainly for an answer,
> Long sat waiting for an answer,
> And repeating, loud and louder,
> 'Take my bait, O King of Fishes!'"

Down in the depths he could see the fishes swimming; the yellow perch, the sahwa, the

shawgashee, the crawfish; on the bows of the canoe, with tail erected, sat the squirrel, Adjidaumo, and on the white sand of the bottom

> "Lay the monster Mishe-Nahma,
> Lay the Sturgeon, King of Fishes,
> Through his gills he breathed the water,
> With his fins he fanned and winnowed,
> With his tail he swept the sand floor."

There he lay in all his armour, plates of bone upon his forehead, with spines projecting. Above him came Hiawatha sailing in his birch canoe, with his fishing line of cedar.

> "'Take my bait!' said Hiawatha,
> Down into the depths beneath him,
> 'Take my bait, O Sturgeon, Nahma!
> Come up from below the water,
> Let us see which is the stronger!'
> And he dropped his line of cedar
> Through the clear transparent water."

The sturgeon, Nahma, lay quietly fanning the water, till wearied of the call and clamour, he said to the pike, the Maskenozah, "Take the bait of this rude fellow, break the line of Hiawatha!" Hiawatha felt the loose line jerk and tighten, and it tugged so that the birch canoe stood endwise, like a birch log in the water; but Hiawatha was full of scorn when he saw the pike coming nearer and nearer to him, and he shouted through the water, "Shame upon you! You are but the pike; you are not the fish I

wanted, you are not the King of Fishes!" Then the sunfish seized the line of Hiawatha, swung with all his weight upon it, made a whirlpool in the water, till the water flags and rushes nodded in the distant marshes. "Esa! Esa! shame upon you! you are Ugudwash, the sunfish, you are not the fish I wanted."

At last Nahma heard the shout, and challenge of defiance, and

> "Up he rose with angry gesture,
> Quivering in each nerve and fibre,
> Clashing all his plate of armour,
> Gleaming bright with all his warpaint;
> In his wrath he darted upward,
> Flashing leaped into the sunshine,
> Opened his great jaws and *swallowed*
> *Both canoe and Hiawatha!*"

Naturally, you would think, this is the end of Hiawatha! but not a bit of it. Here is another Jonah, in the sturgeon's belly; how he fared, he and his faithful little squirrel and his canoe, and how he got out, must be told in his own words:

> "Down into that darksome cavern
> Plunged the headlong Hiawatha,
> As a log on some black river
> Shoots and plunges down the rapids,
> Found himself in utter darkness,
> Groped about in helpless wonder,
> Till he felt a great heart beating,
> Throbbing in that utter darkness,
> And he smote it in his anger,
> With his fist, the heart of Nahma,

Felt the mighty King of Fishes
Shudder through each nerve and fibre.
Heard the water gurgle round him
As he leapt and staggered through it
Sick at heart, and faint and weary."

Then Hiawatha drew his canoe crosswise, fearing that in the turmoil and confusion he might be hurled forth from the jaws of Nahma and perish. The squirrel, Adjidaumo, frisked and chattered gaily and toiled and tugged with Hiawatha, till the labour was completed, and Hiawatha thanked his little friend, and then it was that he christened him, and said the boys should henceforth call him Adjidaumo, Tail-in-air.

"And again the sturgeon, Nahma,
Gasped and quivered in the water,
Then was still, and drifted landwards
Till he grated on the pebbles,
Till the listening Hiawatha
Heard him grate upon the pebbles,
Knew that Nahma, King of Fishes,
Lay there dead upon the margin."

Hiawatha heard a clang and flapping, a screaming and confusion as of birds of prey contending; he saw a gleam of light above him, shining through Nahma's ribs, and the glittering eyes of seagulls gazing at him through the opening, and he heard them saying to each other, "'Tis our brother Hiawatha."

"And he shouted from below them,
Cried exulting from the caverns:

'O ye seagulls! O my brothers!
I have slain the sturgeon, Nahma;
Make the rifts a little larger,
With your claws the opening widen,
Set me free from this dark prison,
And henceforward and forever
Men shall speak of your achiev'ments,
Calling you Kayoshk, the seagulls,
Yes, Kayoshk, the noble scratchers!'"

Then the wild and clamorous seagulls toiled with beak and claws, and made the rifts and openings wider in the mighty ribs of Nahma, and thus they released Hiawatha.

Hiawatha called his grandmother, old Nokomis, and pointing to the sturgeon, Nahma, lying lifeless on the pebbles, told her that he had slain "The King of Fishes."

"Drive them not away, Nokomis,
They have saved me from great peril
In the body of the sturgeon;
Wait until their meal is ended;
Till their craws are full with feasting—
Then bring all your pots and kettles
And make oil for us in Winter."

Three whole days and nights did it take Nokomis and the gulls to strip the oily flesh of Nahma—

"Till the waves washed through the rib-bones,
Till the seagulls came no longer,
And upon the sands lay nothing
But the skeleton of Nahma."

I am indebted to Messrs. Gay and Bird for the use of the illustration, which is taken from a very pretty edition of "Hiawatha" published by them.

CHAPTER XIV

OUR HOLIDAY IN NORTH WALES

August 15th to September 5th, 1905.

THE London and North-Western Railway Company seem to take a special interest in North Wales, particularly in the seaside town of Rhyl. Their station at Rhyl is one of the finest in Wales, and would certainly compare favourably with almost any other station in town or country.

It was in consequence of the special facilities offered by that company that we decided to spend our holidays in Wales, Rhyl being the central point from which to explore the country round. After we had completed our arrangements for settling down there, we were comforted by being told that Rhyl was not a desirable place to go to, that it was in a decadent state, etc. We did not find it so, quite the con-

trary; it seemed to be in a very lively, animated condition, quite up to date with most of the twentieth-century novelties in the way of electric lighting, motor-cars, etc. We had comfortable lodgings on the parade, where we could see all that was going on east and west. On a really fine day down there on the parade and on the sands are to be seen many thousands of people, seemingly all of one and the same class, very respectable and orderly. We saw no such thing as rowdyism all the time we were there; there was plenty of innocent flirtation among the girls and boys (Rhyl has a reputation for that sort of thing).

One objection which some people make to Rhyl is that the tide recedes for about a mile and leaves the sands bare for that distance, but others seem to like it for that very reason; then it is that they may be seen away off in the distance seeking shells and precious stones which they never find, and with small fear of being caught by the inflowing tide. Everybody in Rhyl does the same thing at the same time. You will see the beach and parades covered with many thousands of people lounging on the sands, swimming from the bathing machines, and so on. Then there is the lecturer on phrenology and other kindred subjects for the guidance of young men and maidens, who eagerly rush up to the platform where they are taught to know

themselves. The lecturer is always surrounded by hundreds of eager and respectful hearers, wondering at the boundless knowledge displayed by him.

Then there is a grand stand of pierrots charming an innumerable host; during the intervals of time between these performances Master Punch seizes his opportunity, and attracts as great a crowd now as he ever did hundreds of years ago; then a ventriloquist with a pair of grotesque puppets affords much amusement. These are about all the attractions on the seashore. Always at five minutes to one these allurements are abandoned; not a soul is left on parade or shore, all have gone home to lunch or dinner. At half-past two or three o'clock they begin to stream forth again, and the morning's performances are repeated. At five minutes to five there is again a clearance, and all Rhyl has gone home to tea; this takes up an hour more or less, and morning and afternoon's performances are kept up till bedtime. This may be said to be the normal state of things, but a rough, cold, windy or rainy day upsets these delights, and indoor life is not exhilarating.

This is, briefly, the kind of life as it is lived on the sands of Rhyl. One of the things one cannot help noticing there is the unusual number of pretty, plump, healthy little children, many of them perfect models of happy child-

hood. I have already hinted that Rhyl has a pleasant reputation for innocent flirtation, and really this reputation can hardly be wondered at when one remembers that the immense majority of the girls one meets on the parade are extremely pretty, fresh, and fascinating. I write, of course, as an ancient philosopher, but if I were young—let us pass on!

Rhyl's great attractions are not confined to its shores; the chief attraction to many of us is to get out of it, and to enable us to do this there are plenty of conveniences. To say nothing of the various tourist and excursion rounds that the London and North-Western Railway Company provides, there are numerous four-horse mail coaches and three-horse chars-à-bancs that will take you anywhere and any distance up to thirty or forty miles a day, and into the most charming scenes to be found in Wales.

On fine days these coaches are always crowded with passengers. On many occasions we availed ourselves of this means of seeing the country.

One day we had a most delightful trip, which I wish I could describe adequately. We went through the pretty little town of Abergele, and away up over the hills, past a little cottage where Oliver Cromwell once slept, and on and on over hill and dale till we arrived at the quaint and most picturesque little town called *Llanfairtal-hairarn*—it is a longish word, and I am not sure

By permission of Mr. FitzNorman Ellis.

MR. W. FITZNORMAN ELLIS FISHING THE CELEBRATED WILLIAM'S POOL ON THE LEDR.

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about the spelling—and there we all took tea. We looked in at the little Welsh church perched on a hill overlooking the town. We rambled down to the River Elwy, which passes through this village, and on through the most charming scenery. The River Elwy is said to be full of fish, but in this dreary month of August it is not fishable, the water being too low and almost stagnant for any chance of fly-fishing, as our good Major has proved lower down and nearer to the sea, where it flows into the River Clwyd. At this point many sea-trout have recently been caught with the worm, but that is a style of fishing not appreciated by a fly-fisher.

We returned by another and a glorious route through the Vale of Llanfair. The road takes us mainly along the side of a range of hills, and through a wood overlooking the beautiful vale through which the Elwy winds its way, and gives us glimpses of the rugged and opposing hills. The most interesting part is the Bryn-y-pin Pass: from that point there is a grand opening up of wild mountain scenery. It so happened that the afternoon proved an ideal one for passing through this most picturesque bit of wild country, which has not inappropriately been called "The Switzerland of Wales." Our drive through the woods was enlivened by the singing of Welsh hymns and English songs by a party of youths and maidens on the coach—their clear, sweet

voices and the frequent blasts on the long coach-horn, which echoed through this scenery, added a new pleasure to our ride. Our hornblower managed very cleverly, as we all thought, to get out several tunes, such as "Auld Lang Syne," on this long keyless tube.

The (reputed) Birthplace of H. M. Stanley.

Continuing this most picturesque route we come at length to a little village, the name of which I forget, but the great and attractive feature of it is the inn called the "Cross Foxes." This is a modest, neat, little inn, now kept by Mr. Thomas Eastham; when our coach reached it it was already surrounded by half a dozen other coaches, whose loads of people were streaming, crushing, and crowding into this inn. "This inn, ladies and gentlemen," cried our enthusiastic conductor, "will be celebrated for all time, for it was here that the mother of the celebrated traveller, Henry M. Stanley, lived and died only recently, and here it is supposed the great hero was born. Inside will be seen his portrait hung on the wall, and upstairs is the handsome tent-bed on which he slept. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Stanley was a Welshman, he rose from very humble circumstances, by indomitable pluck, to become the most celebrated explorer of his age. I am a Welshman, and I am

proud of him, and so are all his countrymen!" and there was hearty applause!

I saw the coloured lithograph on the staircase wall, and the handsome tent-bedstead upstairs; *ergo*, I ought to believe; in fact, part of the story is doubtless correct, and the whole of it has the merit of worthy enthusiasm, and of extreme inaccuracy.

Apart from this little Stanley incident, we had a glorious drive, and a mile or two onwards from the "Cross Foxes" we passed through the City of St. Asaph, the smallest "city" in the United Kingdom, and so homeward.

It was on another occasion that we drove to St. Asaph and visited the beautiful old cathedral. As St. Asaph is the smallest city, its cathedral is the smallest of all our cathedrals. Of course, with my usual youthful agility I ran up to the top of the tower, 127 steps, no great height, but as the cathedral is set on a hill the tower commands a very extensive view of fine scenery in every direction, particularly of the Vale of Clwyd; from it was pointed out "The Union" where H. M. Stanley was educated. Some of our young people followed me to the top, others had regard for their knees, and lost the sight.

On another occasion half a dozen of us mounted a four-horse coach for a peep at Colwyn Bay. We had scarcely got outside the town when we passed by the fragments of another

four-horse coach. Our coachman drew up to give us a peep at it over the wall in a shed. The horses had bolted; the coach was smashed to atoms. The horses were there undergoing surgical operations for serious injuries they had received. We were told, but we cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, that there was only one lady passenger and a lapdog. The lady escaped unhurt, "the dog it was that died." The coachman, who it seems was an amateur, was looking wofully on the wreck. Our man said, with a fine contempt, that this young fellow knew nothing about driving, and was too conceited to be taught. "That little job," said he, "will cost him over two hundred 'quid.'" It was not an interesting sight for those of us who were nervous on our fully-laden coach, but some of our youngsters pretended to look on it as a mere spill, something of daily occurrence, and not worth even passing notice.

"The Marble Church" at Bodelwyddan, was built in 1860. Its graceful spire, 202 feet high, stands up in the middle of an extensive valley, and is seen for many miles. It is one of the greatest attractions of all the inland places. It is altogether an exquisite and most lovely example of modern church architecture. The interior columns are all of solid polished marble, as the entablatures and cornices, etc., are also of marble of varied colours, and the oak carving

throughout is exquisite. It is a memorial church built at a cost of £60,000 by the late Lady Willoughby de Broke, in memory of her husband. It also contains a window to her own memory. We drove over there to service one Sunday morning, and found the road in front of the church full of coaches, carriages, and chars-à-bancs, and the church crowded with visitors.

Another time we had a long drive to Llandudno, through pleasant coast scenery. Of course, we all enjoyed the trip, for we were a happy young party, and I am afraid sometimes we made more noise on the coach than was in accord with strict decorum. Passing over the shoulder of *Little Orme's Head* brought to memory two sad events in connection with my own family. Thirty years ago or more, the young wife of a relative, walking with a friend on that treacherous headland, was blown off by one of those sudden and strong blasts which are frequent, and killed on the rocks below; and by a singular fatality another young lady friend met an exactly similar fate from the same spot only a short time ago.

Cefyn Caves and Rocks are worth going a long way to see. We walked through the caves, but it must be confessed we were glad to get out of them, for there is nothing to be seen in them; they were once, in prehistoric times, inhabited by hyenas, bears, rhinoceroses, bisons—

as the bones of these animals once found therein testify. Now the chief attraction to me at least is the lovely woodland scenery which encompasses them.

Then there is *Dyserth Waterfall*, within walking distance of Rhyl. It is quite picturesque, and when after heavy rain the waterfall is full, as it was when we saw it, it presents a really grand appearance, and comes down like that of "Lodore." When Dr. Johnson "trudged unwilling to see it" in 1774, he was not sorry to find it dry!

We had planned on two or three days to go the Snowdonian round, forty or fifty miles away, but the weather forbad. What is the use or where is the pleasure of ascending Snowdon in a thick fog? I may say that we had very changeful, fitful weather during the whole of our time —bad for us, bad for corn crops still out, bad for shopkeepers and coach proprietors—but, I suppose, good for turnips!

Fishing.

Whenever I have taken a holiday I have invariably been accompanied by my rod, net, and other angling paraphernalia; as we were going into Wales for a month it may be imagined that I did not omit them on this occasion. It has so happened that I never unpacked them. For the first fortnight or so the rivers were low and sluggish and quite unfishable. Then came

a time when they were flooded and unapproachable. Whilst we, in the neighbourhood of Rhyl, have not been fortunate in our fishing weather, my daughter Rose, who is a bit of an enthusiast, has had better luck in the North of Scotland. She and her husband have been having what she calls a "most delightful time"; they spent a week at Lairg and fished three lochs.

"Fishing there now," she says, "is not good as they have had *too much* rain, but we did not do badly, and on Loch Beannath we got eleven nice trout; the biggest was about 1¾ lb. We thought it a poor day, but on our return to the hotel we were much congratulated on our basket —so we felt better. It was a very trying day, nothing but squalls the whole time. . . . We came on here yesterday, and here we are (at Forsinard, Sutherlandshire) in a most comfortable hotel, good feeding and attendance, all to ourselves. . . . It is all moorland and hills, most lovely, such soft air, just like their water, and the sun out all day. We cycled on the Helmsdale Road to see a loch we are to fish to-morrow (good luck go with us), and this afternoon we wandered over the moor and up by the River Halladale; coming back we were resting by the falls when to our delight we saw salmon jumping, trying to get up a difficult fall. We have never seen anything of the kind before, and we spent quite an hour watching them. They do fight hard, poor beggars; they were not large, only about 2 lb. or 3 lb., but it was wonderful how, like Bruce's spider, they tried and tried."

CHAPTER XV

SOME NOTES ON SALMON AND TROUT FISHING IN NORTH WALES

By R. B. Marston

WHEN SAINT ANTHONY HAD DONE PREACHING TO THE FISHES

"The Pikes went on stealing,
The eels went on eeling,
The crabs were backsliders,
The stock fish thick siders,
Much delighted were they,
But went on their own way."

(*As I have already said, circumstances prevented my having even a day's fishing to my great disappointment. I have with his permission availed myself of my son's description of what he did in the way of fishing on this Welsh excursion. He did but little, for no one has command of wind and weather; but what he did he describes in a very practical way—and he throws out some hints which may prove of use to many anglers.*—E. M.)

WHAT a pity it is that Welsh anglers do not appear to appreciate the fact that in the lovely rivers and lakes of their delightful country they have what ought to be, and what might

be, waters unsurpassed in the United Kingdom as a paradise for anglers.

If in the following notes of a visit to North Wales in August and September, 1905, I say anything which hurts the feelings of Welsh anglers, I can only say that it is far from my intention to do so, as it would be a poor reward for the unvarying kindness I met with. I have no desire to pose as a critic, but as an outsider generally sees most of the game, it may do no harm, if it does no good, to mention a few points which I think would strike any angler visiting North Wales for the first time for many years.

Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, etc.

A question which is very often put by anglers is, Where can I find a bracing, pleasant seaside holiday resort to take the family, with some trout fishing within reasonable distance? This is becoming more difficult to find every year, and in view of the fact that greater expense is incurred every year by seaside resorts to attract visitors, the wonder is that those which hold out possibilities to the angler so strangely neglect them. If the trout and salmon fishing within easy reach by rail or coach from Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, and other favourite Welsh watering-places were as good as it ought to be,

the number of visitors from all parts of England would greatly increase. There is such an unlimited extent of good water open to the angler that all that is required is real protection and stocking as regards trout, and protection and proper fish-passes for salmon and sea-trout.

The Clwyd and Elwy.

Rhyl is the best place on the sea from which to fish two lovely trout streams, the Clwyd and Elwy, which in the autumn often afford excellent sea-trout fishing, with a good chance of a salmon —last month Major F. M. Leslie, a famous angler and salmon fly-tier, recorded in the "Fishing Gazette" the capture of a 25 lb. salmon by Mr. Kelly, and later one of 27½ lb. by Lieut.-Col. Bartley. It was Major Leslie's account of the formation of the Clwyd and Elwy Fishing Association a year or two ago, and information kindly supplied by that very good angler, Mr. H. Whitty, of Liverpool, which led me to select Rhyl as head-quarters for our annual outing. I was told that if I went up to the Junction Pool I should see any quantity of sea-trout, and that there was a good chance of getting a brace or two with the fly in the evening or with the worm in the daytime.

The famous Junction Pool, where the Elwy joins the Clwyd, is easily reached by rail or road from Rhyl, either by going to Rhuddlan or

JUNCTION POOL, ON RIVER CIWAD.

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St. Asaph. Rhuddlan is a mile or so below the top of the tidal water, and a walk along the river past the fine old ruins of Rhuddlan Castle is a very enjoyable one. Some of the tidal pools look very attractive, but I was told by local anglers that it is the exception rather than the rule to get any fish in them. Above the tideway the river's course is broken by most inviting-looking streams and pools right up to the Junction. The chief sport on this reach is with sea-trout and salmon—chiefly the former—in the autumn, and on the few occasions I fished it when the water was in order I saw quantities of fish; in consequence of the low state of the rivers, they were unable to get up beyond the Junction and Railway Bridge Pools. On my first visit to the Railway Bridge Pool, I had a chat with an angler, whom I found out afterwards was Mr. Percy J. Tayler, hon. sec. of the Llanfair and Llangerniew Angling Association, whose water is higher up the Elwy. Like all other anglers I met in Wales, he was most kind in giving information. He had killed about four brace of good sea-trout on the worm; fly, he told me, was useless in the daytime.

Light-Ledgering for Sea-Trout.

Mr. Tayler, who is a most successful master of the art, and other anglers, spoke of this worm-fishing for sea-trout in an apologetic manner,

which was quite unnecessary as far as I was concerned.

Ledgering with a light fly rod and fine gut has always a certain kind of fascination for me, for any kind of fish. I would not use a worm if there was any chance with the fly, any more than any other angler would do so. A curious part of this fishing is that there are only certain limited spaces in these pools where the fish will "take," and the only worm which appears to be attractive is one about 2 in. or 3 in. in length, obtained out of local road sweepings—one of those slim, lively, pink fellows found chiefly in light clay soil. Mr. Tayler told me they had turned in large numbers of trout fry, and from the number of yearlings I saw afterwards higher up the Elwy Valley, I think there is no doubt they are doing well. As regards the sea-trout and salmon, what the Elwy wants is a thorough overhauling of its high weirs, which are impassable, except in high floods. I was told by two anglers I met at St. Asaph one evening, when waiting for a train, that it was sickening to see the fish dashing themselves time after time, until they were cut and bleeding, against the stones of one particularly bad dam a mile or two up stream. I saw other dams higher up which were quite bad enough. Then, it is absurd to expect that a couple of keepers could possibly "watch" so many miles of river, which in a dry season

PONT-Y PANT FALLS.

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like last is little more than a succession of pools with a trickle of stream between them. Want of funds is, of course, the chief reason why these local angling associations cannot do more than they do. What is wanted is that the London and North-Western Railway and the seaside towns of the district, which depend so much on visitors, should strongly support the local associations. It would unquestionably pay them to do so; for as Mr. Roberts points out in his guide, "all fair angling can be compensated for by restocking."

Mr. Tayler told me that I ought to have a day or two on the fine stretch of water which can be fished by visitors to the hotel at St. George, near Abergele, and I did have a delightful day or two there later on with Mr. Whitty, who knows the whole district. It is as pretty a bit of fly-fishing water as one could wish to see, and two tickets are available by staying at the hotel. Weather and water conditions were against us, and we did very little—indeed, so late in the season good sport with the fly is exceptional on these mountain streams. For these reasons (weather and water) I did not avail myself of an invitation to fish the Llanfair and Llangerniew Association Water on this occasion, but hope to have that pleasure at some future time. I had heard about the water from Dr. Humphreys a year or two ago, and Mr. Tayler tells me they have a good

stock of trout from ½ lb. to 1 lb. The scenery on the Elwy is enchanting.

The Clwyd—A Dry Fly River.

Of the Clwyd I saw only a few yards, and am indebted to an angler I met at the Junction Pool one soaking wet evening, not only for the following information about the Clwyd, and for two photographs of the Junction Pool, one looking up stream and the other down, but also for wading across the ford at the end of it with me and my impedimenta on his back! [Not a trifling load as he weighs about thirteen stone. —E. M.]

He says: "Your query *re* Clwyd as a brown trout river: I am afraid I am hardly competent to give an opinion; however, I will give you what my limited experience has taught me. The Clwyd is very sluggish and winding for the greater part of its length, deep, with a muddy bottom. The trout are rather short and thick, and, in my opinion, not particularly good eating, but they are game fish in season, and the river is rich in flies. Fishing a good reach on a good day, I consider the Association Water above Llanerch Park, between St. Asaph and Trefnant, as good as any—the fish are not likely to average much over 5 oz., though a couple of half or three-quarter pounders are likely to have a place in the bag. I should consider six to ten brace a good day's sport. The river I should imagine particularly suited to dry fly. I am not a dry-fly

By permission of Mr. F. FitzNorman Ellis.

"BUTTERPOOL," PONT-Y-PANT.

The fishing and shooting lodge of Mr. W. FitzNorman Ellis

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man myself, and, in fact, fish the Clwyd but very little. The Elwy is a much more swift and turbulent stream, shallow, stony, and boulder strewn. It is more suitable for wet fly, I think. It is likely, I think, that next year or the year after some good baskets of trout will be got in it. Two years ago the river was restocked by the Association, and fish of about 6 in. are now quite plentiful. I do not mean to suggest that there are no bigger ones, and I myself usually do better in this river than in the Clwyd."

I had some very pleasant days on the Lledr when staying at the house of my friend, Mr. W. FitzNorman Ellis, whose house is most delightfully situated on the side of a hill overlooking one of the loveliest bits of river and mountain scenery in the world. In one of the pictures Mr. Ellis may be seen fishing the famous William's Pool, which is close to his house. Mr. Brandreth, who very kindly gave me *carte blanche* to fish his fine salmon pools, lent me two of the photographs from which the Lledr views are taken, namely, the Granlyn Pool and one in which he is seen (with his dog) fishing from a pier of rocks in an artificial salmon pool, that is, one of those he has *made*: in what was formerly a shallow stream there is now 5 ft. to 10 ft. of water, and the salmon take well in these new pools he tells me. I shall refer to this and other matters in connection with salmon fishing on the Lledr and Conway a little later on.

CHAPTER XVI

DAYS ON THE LLEDR AND CONWAY

FOR its short length, as a salmon rod-fishing river, the Conway, in North Wales, is one of the most attractive of waters, indeed, if its chief feeder, the Lledr, is included, I doubt if there is a more picturesque bit of salmon fishing in the United Kingdom. Thanks to the kindness of that very keen angler, Mr. Henry D. Brandreth, who preserves some miles of the Lledr, I had a few days on his water in the early part of last September when staying with my friend, Mr. W. FitzNorman Ellis, at his delightfully-situated residence, Butterpool, near Pont-y-Pant. The house is called after a small salmon pool on the Lledr just above the famous William's Pool, one of the largest and best on the river.

Mr. Brandreth has proved conclusively that it is possible to make good salmon water, that is,

By permission of H. P. Brandreth, Esq.

THE GRANLYN, A FAMOUS SALMON POOL ON THE LLEDR.

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water in which the fish will rest and "take," by erecting rough dams and piers made up of rocks faced with great slabs of slate. In this pool, and others made in a similar way, he now every season gets salmon where formerly the water was too shallow to be any use for salmon fishing. Mr. Brandreth not only gave me his fishing, but also sent his keeper, McNaghten, with me, and a better or keener gillie I never fished with. He knows every pool by heart, and just where the fish is likely to take, if he is there, in every height of water. It is a mighty rocky bit of river between Pont-y-Pant and the Oak Tree Pool below the Granlyn, and the queer perches one has to fish from to make the fly hang properly over the taking spot add greatly to the interest of the fishing. There were not many fish in the river: in fact, Mr. Brandreth told me it was one of the worst seasons he had ever known—long drought, and apparently few fish on the coast to come in when the rain came. In the Granlyn Pool, at the very tail of it, where the water bends over to fall into the pool below, I hooked a salmon, and had it on for perhaps a couple of minutes when the fly came away. Again, at the very tail of a pool above the Granlyn, I had my fly taken by a fish of 10 lb. or 12 lb. I called out to McNaghten that I had hooked a fish, but after coming steadily for a yard or two up the pool, he rolled over, and

again the fly came away. These were the only salmon I hooked, and with the exception of one hooked by McNaghten, which I landed, and getting one or two rises, this was all we did, although we tried every pool at least twice in the day. How many thousand casts I made for some half dozen offers from the fish I do not know, but there is something inexpressibly fascinating in watching your salmon fly, as you can nearly always do when looking down into a pool from a perch on the rocks above, with a short line—small as it is, and we used nothing much over an inch in length, you can see the blue or yellow, or whatever colour predominates, as the fly works along in the swirly dark water over the critical spot. "You see that break in the side of the rock on the far side, sir, where the water goes in under, that's where he will come."

"Do you think he will come, McNaghten?" I said as the fly came out of the little dark cavern where the stream had taken it after the cast. "That is the beauty of salmon fishing, sir, you never know. I have seen many a fish come and take just where the fly is now. Work it a trifle faster just there—they follow it out from under the rock." "Try him again, sir." McNaghten was always hopeful, at any rate, he let me lose no chance, as far as he could help it. I know that I missed one or two through not striking promptly. One gets slack after casting for hours,

and when the rise at last comes the response is too late too often. "Did you feel him, sir?" "No, thank goodness!" "Then we will try him as we come back"—but that first chance is, as I well know, *the* chance, and I feel angry with myself for missing it.

Whew! how hot it was, a steaming evening with not a breath of air, and the midges in millions. We tried the fish again coming back, but in vain, nor would the sea-trout in William's Pool look at the fly. What a blessing it was to know that every weary step brought one nearer to the only barrel of beer in the Lledr Valley, and its pleasant gurgle and froth as Mrs. Ellis poured out a glass in the porch reminded one of the foam and amber swirl of the Butterpool close by.

"Do you know, Mr. Marston, it is a funny thing, but all our friends who come here fishing are ready for a glass of beer when they get back. I suppose it's the air!"

"Ready! Mrs. Ellis! Dying would be nearer the mark."

"No luck! I am sorry. How did you like the rod?" cheerily chimes in Mr. Ellis, and I tell him that it is perfect, just the thing for this rocky, confined river—a light greenheart under fifteen feet, but with plenty of backbone. My host had most kindly placed his stock of rods and tackle at my disposal.

When fishing on the Elwy with Mr. Whitty, he had told me that Mr. T. Lloyd Jones, who knew the Conway well, would have a day or two with me on that river; he very kindly did so, and in his excellent company I fished all the best pools from nearly as high up as the Granlyn on the Lledr down to the Railway Bridge below the junction of the Llugwy and the Conway. A more beautiful series of ideal salmon pools it would be difficult to find. But sport was hopeless, only two salmon had been killed by rod and line all the season in the Conway, and we had to fish most of the time in such a tearing gale of wind and rain as I have rarely seen equalled—"A great gale in North Wales" the ubiquitous "Daily Mail" poster called it.

It was not a steady gale, but came roaring down from the mountains in a succession of gusts, each stronger than the last, and would then die away for a brief interval, then when you had waded out and got a precarious foothold down came the wind and nearly upset you; in fact, several times I gave up and came ashore for a rest, avoiding big trees, expecting to hear a crash every minute. It was very disappointing to wade down such lovely pools and never get a "rug," but I enjoyed it immensely. You could not expect to do much under such conditions.

Beyond seeing a couple of salmon jump, we did nothing as far as the fish were concerned.

Mr. Ellis had lent me a light Leonard split cane salmon rod, for which my line was a trifle too heavy against such a gale. Mr. Jones was using a stiff greenheart—a grand rod made by Mr. Whitty, of Liverpool, with which he got out yards more line than I could manage, and it was a pleasure to see Tom the keeper, who had been up all the previous night catching poachers, make the fly at the end of the line on it cut through the air and go out straight as a die—the wind seemed to make very little difference to him.

The Sad Condition of the Conway.

Previous to last September it was more than thirty years since I had seen the Conway, and I have always had fixed on my mental vision, like a photograph, some stretch of the river near Llanrwst, because it was alive with jumping salmon. Many a time since then I have thought of those fish, and many a time I have talked with friends who fished the lovely river, and of late years, although they still fished it, their reports were ever and ever more disheartening. I made inquiries and looked about for myse when at Bettws-y-Coed last September, and I am convinced that the Conway as a salmon angling river is suffering from a complication of diseases. There is poaching, unquestionably; but probably not worse than has been the case for fifty

years, or a hundred for that matter; there is over-netting doubtless, that unfortunately is the case with nearly all our salmon rivers, but I fear the chief sinner is the gas company—if it is a company—at Bettws-y-Coed. I *know*, from experience of the effect of refuse from gasworks on fisheries in all parts of the country, that nothing is so deadly to fish life, except bleach from paper mills. Consequently, when I saw the gasometer within a few yards of the Church Pool at Bettws-y-Coed, I said to Mr. Jones, "If the refuse from that gasworks goes into the Conway, I am not surprised at the salmon fishing falling off."

From the letter of a Conway Salmon Angler, which I have before me, I fear there is no doubt the refuse does get into the river. He says:

"With regard to the gasworks, I believe the waste runs directly into the river; at any rate, opposite the works in low water a pipe can be seen which continually discharges limey-looking water into the Church Pool." He adds: "In past days, too, there is no doubt that the lead mines have done a tremendous lot of damage, whilst in addition Llanrwst, Bettws-y-Coed, and other places on the river gaily and daily pour their sewage into it, polluting the water and sickening the fish."

The Conway has always been, and must naturally always be, an "uncertain" salmon river, simply because its water supply is so uncertain

—up quickly, down quickly—and the chief run of fish being late in the season; if there is not plenty of rain then rod fishing cannot be good.

At present the pollution of the Conway between Bettws-y-Coed and the sea is not sufficiently bad to turn the fish back probably or "up," though in low water it will and does do that. But it is more than sufficient to so sicken the fish that in their passage up to the Lledr they feel so uncomfortable that they will not look at, much less take, the most tempting "Blue Doctor"—they have had too much "Black Dose" already. It is only when they get into the much purer water of the Lledr that they feel inclined for a little "Jock Scott" or "Lledr Fancy," or even one of Mr. Brandreth's tempting prawns.

I suppose that the landowners and other inhabitants of the Conway Valley look on the matter in this way: "It would not *pay* to protect the Conway and its tributaries in order to attract a few score salmon anglers. Ours is a tourist district, and the rivers and their waterfalls are just as beautiful whether there are salmon in the pools or not."

There is a good deal of truth in this on the surface, but it is only necessary to think for a moment of the hundreds of thousands of pounds which are attracted every season to Scottish, Irish, and Scandinavian "scenery" districts because they are also good fishing districts to see

what Wales is losing, and losing it more every year. Good fishing attracts not only anglers, but their families, not only their families, but their friends.

Wales is so beautiful that if her rivers and lakes were properly preserved and stocked no other place in this world would better deserve the name of paradise.

It is not saying a little to say that I doubt if any Welshman rejoiced more than I did when the London newspaper boys yelled, "Defeat of New Zealand." Ireland was beaten, Scotland was beaten, I had myself seen England beaten, and it was simply delightful to find those splendid New Zealanders had met their masters in Wales. Why did not somebody tell them to omit their war song! They simply challenged a nation of singers. We Irish and Scotch and English do not begin to know how to sing as compared with the Welsh, and once get them on that lay, "the spirits of their fathers will start from every grave," and no wonder our New Zealand friends were daunted!

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